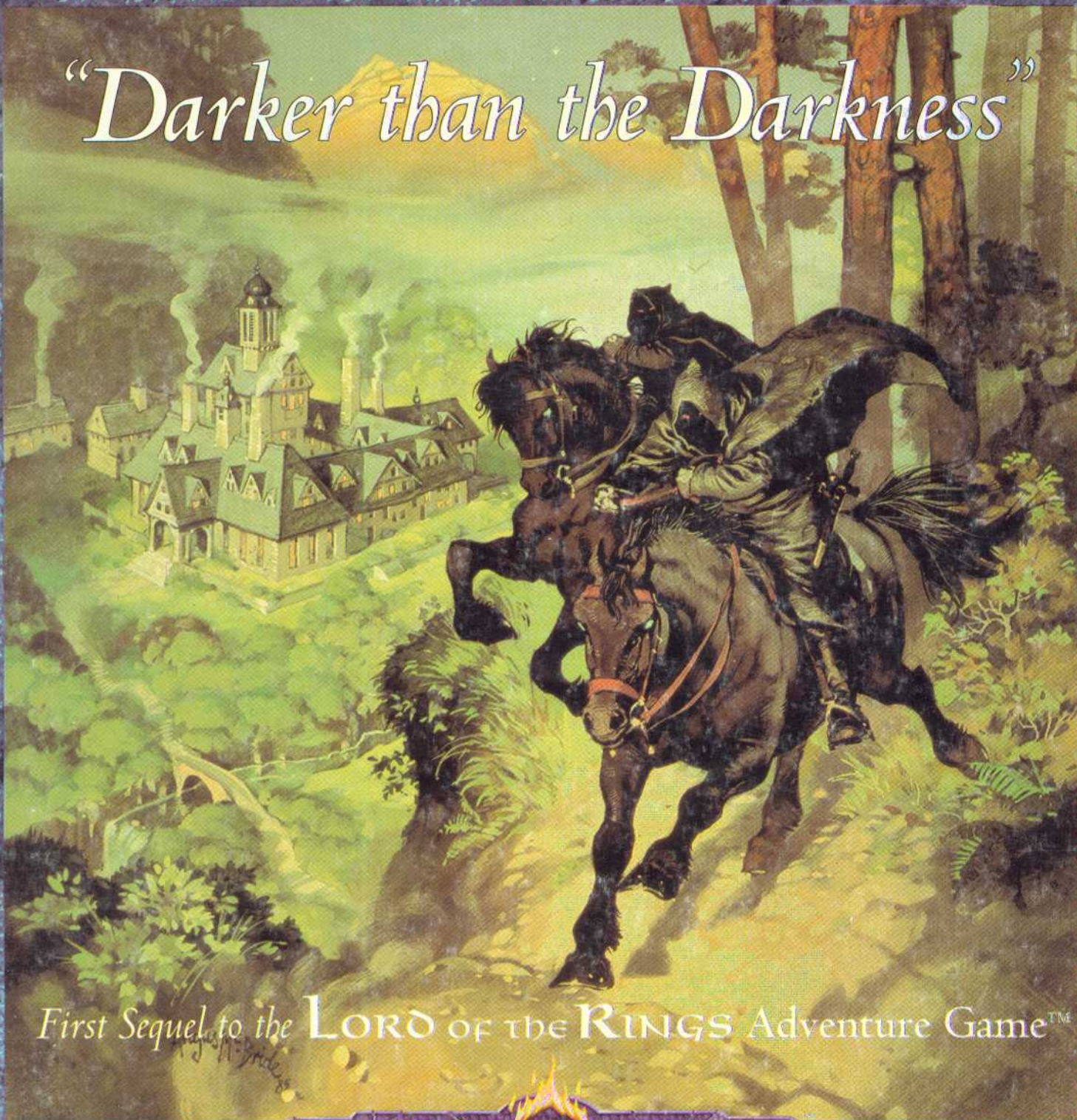


LORD ^{of} the RINGS™

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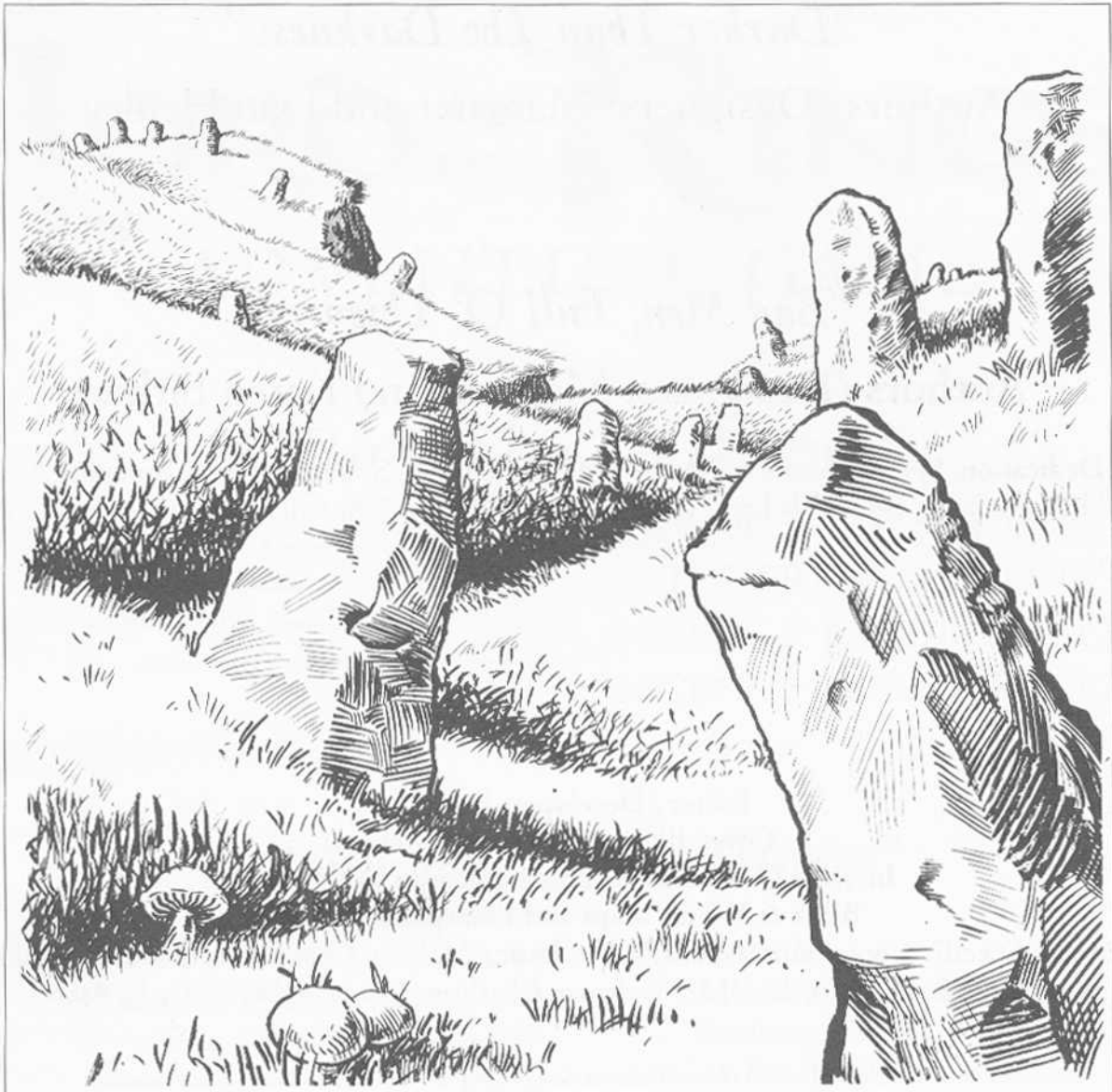
ADVENTURE

"Darker than the Darkness"



First Sequel to the LORD of the RINGS Adventure Game™

middle  earth



G

et out, you old Wight! Vanish in the sunlight!
Shrivel like the cold mist, like the winds go wailing,
Out into the barren lands far beyond the mountains!
Come never here again! Leave your barrow empty!
Lost and forgotten be, darker than the darkness,
Where gates stand for ever shut, till the world is mended.

At these words there was a cry and part of the inner end of the chamber fell in with a crash. Then there was a long trailing shriek, fading away into an unguessable distance; and after that silence.

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, page 197 *

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LORD ^{of} the RINGS TM

ADVENTURE GAME

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ragged, threadbare tapestry covered the massive stones of the tomb wall. The once-brilliant strands of the hanging had faded to drab grey, tan, and brown. Yet a splotch of rust blood, pooling around the feet of the knight pictured in the castle scene, still retained some vibrancy.

Tatharína bent closer. "Look at the helmet worn by this warrior. It's identical to the one lying in the corner here. Do you think it might be cursed?" She moved her torch carefully nearer to the object of her scrutiny.

• ONE • INTRODUCTION

Maybe you're standing in a book store or a hobby store trying to figure out what to buy. Or, better yet, you're sitting comfortably in your own study, trying to figure out what it is you've brought home.

"What is this, anyway?" you mutter. "*Darker than the Darkness?* Hmmm."

It's another adventure for the *Lord of the Rings Adventure Game*™ (LOR). In fact, it's two of them! (Both totally awesome, wild, unexpected, riveting, and dazzlingly fun, if you ask us — but we're biased!) You should get several evenings of entertainment out them.

Call up your friends! Corral your family! And take down the LOR box from your game shelf.

What!? You don't have a *Lord of the Rings Adventure Game*? Well, pull one off the store shelf and take it up to the cash register, quick! Don't hesitate, or you'll think of a dozen reasons why you should be more practical. And then you'll miss out on a whole lot of fun.

What's that? Oh, you do have LOR. Not only do you have it, but it never got on your game shelf, because you keep taking it out to read over breakfast. Well, well. That's the kind of comment we like to hear.

What did you say? Oh, I still don't have it right. You've been so busy that you've barely had time to brush your teeth, and that's about all! Never mind role playing in Middle-earth. It's only the greatest fantasy world of all time! Well, that sounds dreadfully familiar. We're too busy, too!

But here you are at last. You're remembering how much fun you had with "*DAWN COMES EARLY*," and you're ready for some more fantasy role playing. Dig in!

WELCOME BACK!

Congratulations on being a seasoned adventuring group. In "*DAWN COMES EARLY*," you defeated two nasty Trolls and discovered some interesting information. Rolling the dice and checking the tables comes more quickly now. Your characters have all increased in ability and power, and have picked up some nice treasure, too. It's time for the next adventure!

The players should check their Character Records to make sure that the information is correct. Have *experience points* been translated into bonuses? Has the penknife Tatharína lost in Bitter Creek been erased?

While the players are busy reviewing their Records, the GM should read **THE TALE** on page 6. This will give him or her some insight into the mind of the chief adversary in "**DARKER THAN THE DARKNESS.**" It contains material that the players **should not know** as yet, and so must not be read aloud.

What if you haven't played "**DAWN COMES EARLY**"? The dog swallowed it, but left everything else in your **LOR** box alone. Not a problem. Just give each of the PCs 450 experience points, the treasure listed in the box below, and read aloud the summary of their previous adventures below. You'll still be readier than many for the challenges to come.

Or maybe it's been a while since your FRP group last got together. Refresh your memories by reading aloud the synopsis below, take out your luckiest dice, and plunge in!

After you've read the summary (and **THE TALE**, silently of course), turn to page 8 for "**AT THE SIGN OF THE PRANCING PONY.**"

"DAWN COMES EARLY"

In "**DAWN COMES EARLY**," you were introduced to your characters and to Bree-land, just east of the Shire. After some sheep were found missing, Nat Groathusk and Gil Mossgrave accused your friend Tolman Greenthumb of poaching. Meanwhile, Tolman, an expert Finder, was looking for the missing sheep and spotted the real villain: a Troll.

Upon his return, Tolman was promptly arrested by the Shirriff. Tolman sent you a note explaining the danger the Troll posed and asking to be rescued. In response to his plea, your group of adventurers assembled to help the Hobbit escape from jail and stop the Troll.

Sneaking through town, you came to the lockhouse and freed Tolman, and then went after the Troll. Finding not one, but two, Trolls living under the stone bridge outside of town, battle began just before sunrise. Luckily these were true Stone Trolls, and

GM NOTE

If you haven't played "**DAWN COMES EARLY**," you'll need to distribute the treasure the PCs acquired when they claimed the Trolls' possessions. The adventure is part of the characters' history, and besides they'll need the enchanted weapons to seize victory in their next challenge!

Use the following list to assign the enchanted portion of the hoard.

TOLMAN — Lockpicks: add +2 to the *Subterfuge* bonus when the user picks a lock. **Sling stones** (16): when used against Undead, the target receives double the result shown on the Combat Table if hit.

LILY — Hunting Horn: may be sounded 3 times a day; its call lifts the morale of any friends within hearing, adding +1 to their *Melee OBs* and *Missile OBs* for 5 rounds. **Sling stones** (17): same properties as Tolman's. **Penknife:** anyone (this includes the PCs) who has killed a Hobbit, Human, Dwarf, Elf, or Half-elf, when touched by the knife, will fall asleep for 4 hours or until shaken vigorously.

GALLIND — Scroll: reciting the verse on the scroll in the presence of Undead allows the reader (1x/day) to cast the spell *Spiritspear* (6): This spell may

be used against any Spectre, Ghost, or Wight within 100'. Roll the dice and add triple your *Magical bonus*; the result is the amount of *Damage Taken* by the target. **Belt:** adds +3 to *Strength bonus* & +2 to *Melee OB* for 6 rounds, 3x/day.

TATHARÍNA — Golden Queensfan (2 leaves): one leaf placed on the lips of a dead person will bring him or her back to life, fully healed of any injuries. **Pendant:** Once a day, the wearer may cast the spell *Spiritsafe* (4): All within a 10' radius of the caster suffer only half the *Endurance* drainage normally caused by Ghosts, Spectres, and Wights.

GLÁIN — Mask: For 1 hour a day, the wearer may see clearly entities inhabiting the world of shadows; this includes Ghosts, Spectres, Wights, Ringraiths, and things invisible; this adds +2 to the wearer's *Melee OB* and *Missile OB* when attacking such foes. **Battle-axe:** when used against Undead, +2 to *Melee OB* and +2 to *Damage Taken* from successful blows.

RILWEN — Sword: when used vs. Undead, +2 to *Melee OB* and +2 to *Damage Taken* from a successful blow. **Bow:** range of 200'; +1 to *Missile OB* and +1 to *Damage Taken* from a successful hit.

with the rising of the sun they were turned into the stone of which they were made.

Tracking a narrow trace back to the Trolls' cave was easy enough, but there were Gil and Nat brandishing their cudgels. The pair attempted to "silence the busybodies" and leave you as Troll bait. It was a tough fight, but in the end Gil and Nat were the ones in the lockhouse. The Trolls had quite a bit of treasure, enough to make you wealthy and recompense the Bree-landers for the loss of their sheep.

After you returned to a hero's welcome at *The Prancing Pony*, only one thing troubled the fine evening. Gil and Nat mentioned the name of Inledair, the Bandit-king, and the revenge he would take on Bree. Who is this Inledair, where is he, and how will you stop him from troubling the peaceful town of Bree?

THE TALE

A skeleton stirs. In the outer antechamber of Hir Rusark's burial mound, Dargar clutches restlessly at his sword hilt. His dry bones make a small scratching noise on the wire-wrapped hilt. Then stillness returns to the dusty crypt. Another skeleton remains sprawled in the dust.

Long after the flesh has left his bones, Dargar watches over his master, faithful in death as in life. At long intervals, he paces the outer hallway, weirdly lit by the ghastly greenish light of crypt-fungus. He stoops so as not to scrape the seven-foot ceiling. Once huge and overbearing, as a skeleton Dargar is tall, but no longer broad. Assured that everything is secure, he returns to his still watch.

In the inner hallway that circles Hir Rusark's crypt, Queen Renora sits at her loom. Her long dark hair flows over her bony shoulders and pools on the bench beside her. Rags of white silk cling to her skeleton, which is poised as if to weave the rug that molds on her loom. In the bony fingers of her right hand, a large empty shuttle gleams golden. Renora no longer stirs. Not as evil as Hir Rusark, nor as faithful as Dargar and Scop, Renora is truly dead.

Within the central chamber, the plate-mail armor of a Cardolani prince rests on a quiet bier. Hir Rusark's barrow is located south and east of Bree, a full day's journey from the lands commonly occupied by Barrow-wights. This isolation benefits Hir Rusark a great deal, as travellers past his halls do not expect Wights and are not as cautious as in the Barrow-downs. Hir Rusark has lured many unwary victims to his porch. So much life-force has he drained from living beings that his presence is suggested by a skull-like head within a crowned helm.

Little faster than the flow of a glacier, thoughts stream sluggishly through his gelid cranium.

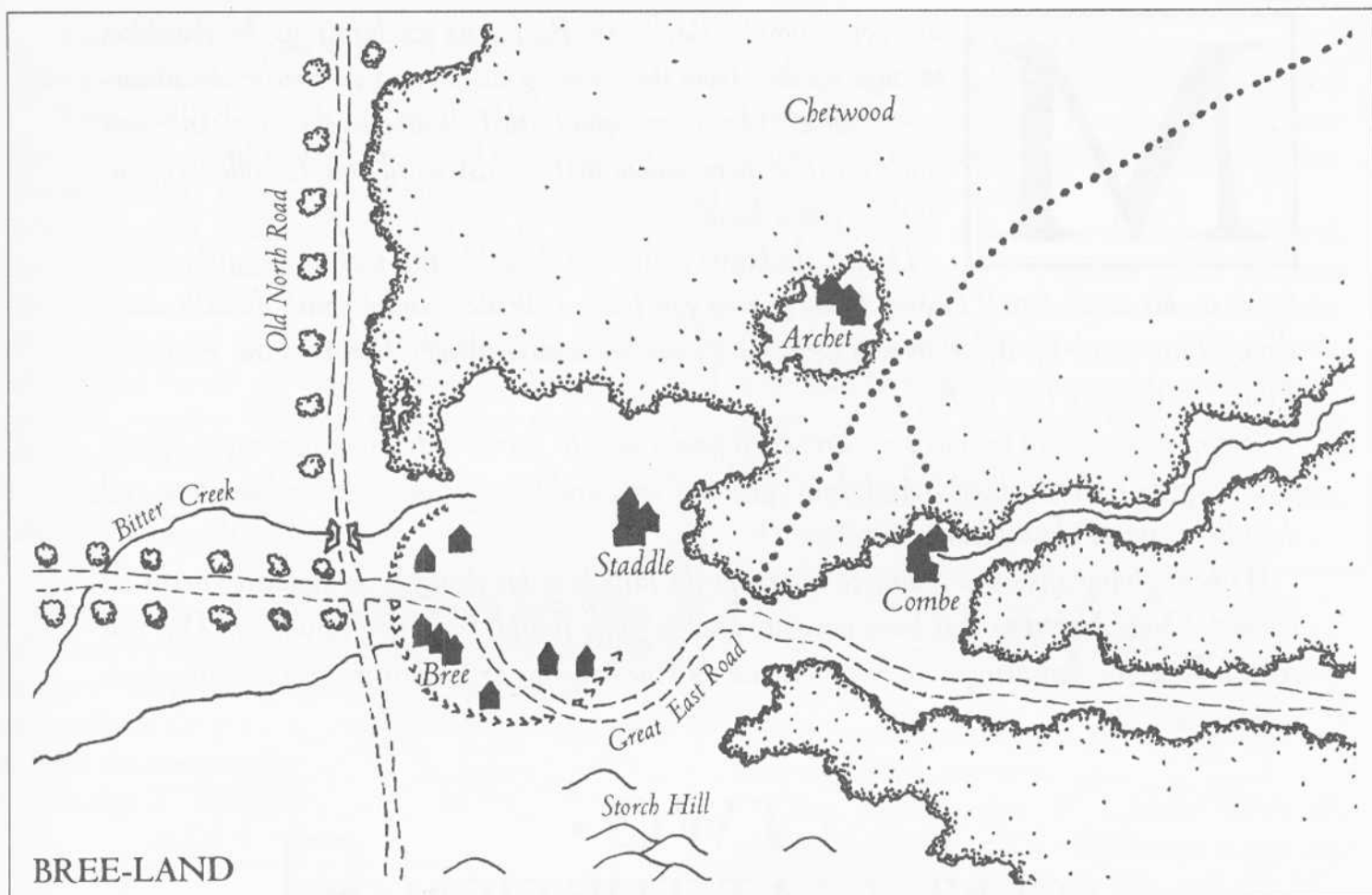
"Ah, the pain!" Suddenly, Hir Rusark's shadowy form sits up. His upper body shows above the armor still lying on the bier.

"My brother Bercar, that vile worm. Was it Bercar that finally stabbed me in the back? He would not have dared, though long did he dream it. Mayhap that weaselly Westlock laid me low in some arcane fashion? He too would not have dared." Hir Rusark lies back. "None of them would have dared, the cowardly swine. All, all were afraid of me. And of Dargar."

GM NOTE

In this adventure, Tolman, Lily, and their friends set out to defeat the Bandit-king Inledair. Unfortunately for them, they must first survive an ancient menace unknown to Bree-folk and the bandits.

In the downs southeast of Bree lies the barrow of Hir Rusark, a Cardolani prince and evil servant of the Dark Lord. Even now, in death, Hir Rusark serves his ancient master, for he lures living creatures to his barrow where he may drain the life from their bodies to feed his endless hunger. Hir Rusark and his eternal servants Dargar and Scop must be defeated before the party can hope to escape their thrall and face Inledair.



"Dargar. Almost would I forget he was there, so quiet and constant was he. Always he was at my back, guarding. I think he never slept. He tasted my food, taking turn after the cook and Bercar and Westlock. None would have dared to harm me, lest they taste his revenge as well as mine." For a long time, the Wight's thoughts are still.

"Yet someone dared. Someone dared, though all knew what must happen. Even as the slow poison worked through my body, Dargar gave to me the pleasure of watching every soul in the castle squirm on the end of his sword. None were left to cry out as the castle flamed, as we smelled the great burning and prepared to out wait eternity. As we prepared to live again, a colder life.

"Not for me the measured handing over of power. Not for me the funeral cortege, my fair wife smudging her eyes dark for sorrow, but using them to pull Bercar to her side. My power, my wealth, are mine alone. What I could not bring with me, I destroyed.

"Glad were my people to see me start to die. But they are gone, gone like the dust on the wind. I remain. Still Dargar serves me. Still, when life nears, I send out my chill power to lure it.

"A threat! Dimly felt. Some turns of the moon distant. Someone, more than one, are nearing. Fate draws them on a fine cord. Fate draws them to my porch, to give me in fealty their life and power. Thus will I quicken, and live again to defend my realm. A realm now shrunk to this narrow underhill keep, but what matter. I keep it all. All the power, all the gold." Hir Rusark lies still, as the thoughts slow to a stop within his rusted helm.



ushrooms now!" Barliman Butterbur exclaims as he shoulders through the door from the steaming kitchen and approaches the adventurers' table. "I know how you Little Folk love mushrooms! And your uncle must be sorry indeed that he mistrusted you, to ladle them out with so free a hand."

He sets the heavy platter on the table and rocks back on his heels, hands on his ample hips. "I don't doubt as how you Little Folk alone could polish the dish clean, though I can scarce lift it, but there it is, its for all you brave adventurers. For the 'Fine, Fair, and Plain,' as they say here in Bree."

"Seeing as you're all friends I'm sure you'll find a way to share." Barliman says more slowly, scratching the top of his head. "And there's plenty o' eggs, and lots o' fried apples and potatoes, and daylilies from Widow Heathertoes."

Without giving anyone a chance to interrupt the tumble of his thoughts, he suddenly turns on his heel. "Nob! Nob! I'm that busy now my head is going round. Nob, you slowcoach! Did you see to a basin for that Ranger in the room with the blue hanging, or is he sitting there cursing your woolly toes?"

• TWO •

SCENE I: "AT THE SIGN OF THE PRANCING PONY"

GM NOTE

In general, encourage your players to get into the spirit and really play their roles. This will create the feeling of the freedom of action that is one of the attractions of role playing.

For example, after you read the following description, if the players say they have lighted the fire in the fireplace, or the candles, or that of course they would have barred the door, encourage them by making their changes part of the scene.

Do they take the candles with them to help light the way to the common room? Do they leave the fire burning when they leave their parlour? Maybe the bar sticks a little bit on the door, but if they give it a tug it will open easily. This kind of detail gives the players a feel for really "living" the experience.

I

As the adventure "DARKER THAN THE DARKNESS" begins, take minute to put on your "GM thinking cap." Do you have a fresh chart ready to keep track of *experience points* earned by the PCs? Pencil sharp? Dice on the table? Yes? Okay, you're ready to go.

Now describe the darkening evening.

Day is drawing to a close. The light is growing dim. You are in the chambers Barliman gave you, a comfortable set of rooms in the back of the inn. The windows are low and round, set deep in the thick walls. The ceiling is high enough to accommodate Elves — or Human innkeepers.

The parlor is comfortable, with chairs and stools of all sizes around a clean, worn, braided wool rug in reds and browns. A fire is laid ready for lighting in the fireplace, and candles in gleaming bronze holders stand ready on the mantelpiece.

The oaken door can be closed from the inside with a sturdy bar.

Two small chambers off the parlor contain their original Hobbit-sized beds, and thick, comfortable pallets topped with featherbeds for the other guests. A small table holds a candle, mugs, and a pitcher of ale. The open windows let in a fresh breeze, laden with the scent of summer flowers. Pegs on the wall provide places to hang cloaks and hoods on either side of a plain, but pleasing, tapestry. Gláin can tell you that these are the finest rooms in *The Pony*.

It has been a long day, and an exciting feast, and the beds look soft and inviting.

Ask your players where their PCs will sleep. Who will occupy which bed? What time do they snuff the candles or turn down the gas? Do they set a watch? Let them tell you the answers. And do they bar the door, or bank the fire?

• *Go to stage 2.*

2

In the wee hours of the morning, Heather Groundsel's chimney catches fire. The PCs are probably fast asleep. They are in the back wing of The Pony, on the far side from the excitement. Even if they keep a watch (or chose to sleep in the Greenthumb's smial), they won't hear any commotion.

At dawn, they are alerted (or awakened, if they are still sleeping) by a knock at the door. To add variety and interest to the game, you may want to knock loudly on the playing table.

(*Knock, Knock.*) There is a knock at the door. A voice calls out.

"Ho within! It's Nob! Open up!"

Nob is the cheery Hobbit who showed you to your rooms. He seems very excited. Could there already be trouble from Inledair? What do you do?

Invite the players to respond. They might call "Wait a minute," say that they walk over to the door, or that they open it, etc. If they try to continue the conversation through the door, Nob replies, "I can't hear you! Open the door!"

• *When the characters have opened the door, go to stage 3.*

GM NOTE

A good GM makes sure that the world reacts to the character's actions. Here is a good opportunity to show that you have not forgotten what the characters have done.

If the party did not bar the door, Nob will burst into the room in a minute unless the door is opened for him. His news is too exciting for him to wait any longer. If the party lit candles or a fire note how they have burned down during the night. All of this detail adds to the believability of the scene and helps players to suspend disbelief, as well as forcing them to consider the results of their actions.

3

When the door is open, Nob bursts in. He is jumping with excitement.

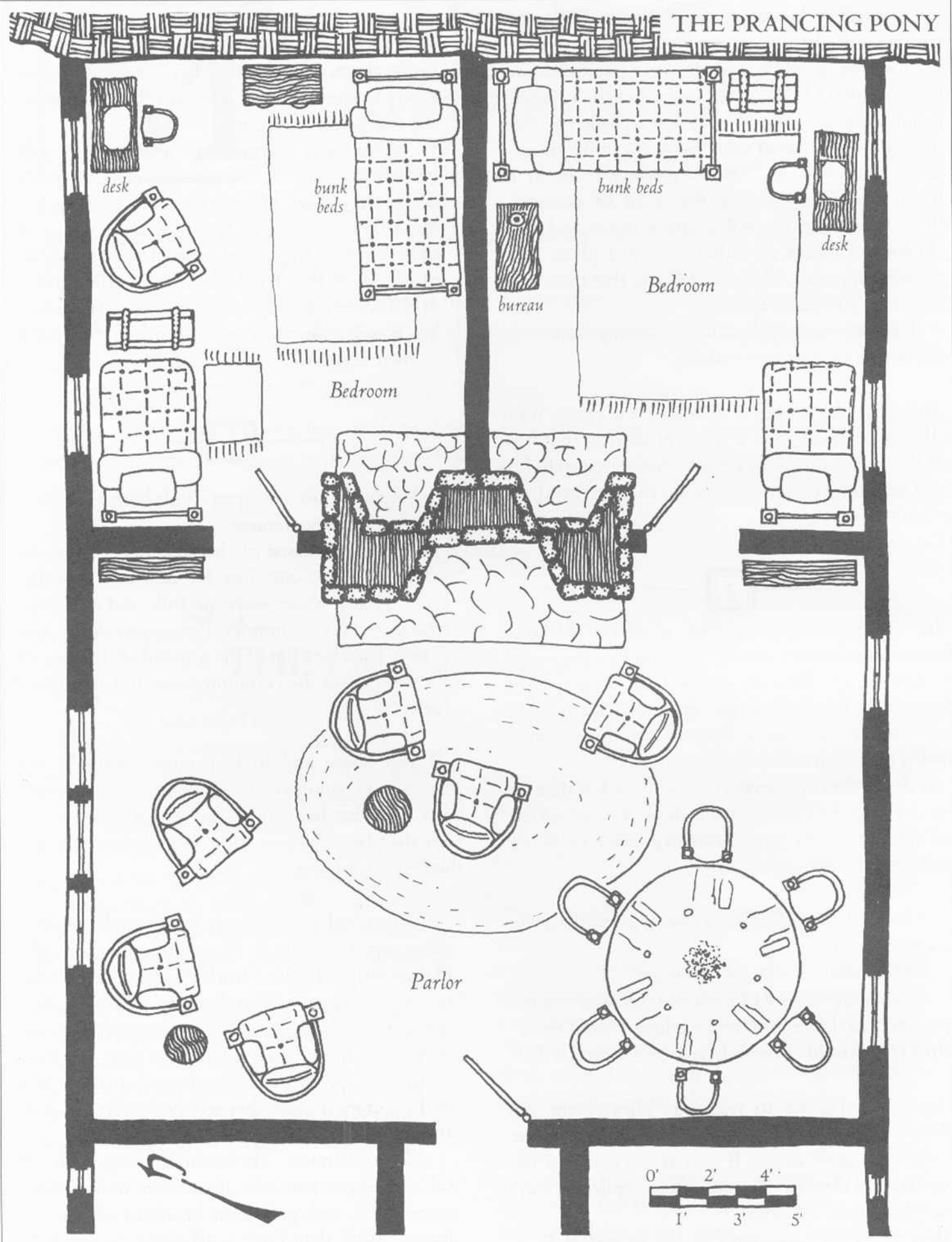
"Boy, you missed it!" he exclaims. "Wow, the whole town was out! Two big doings in one day! First the turn-about with you folk, and now Mistress Groundsel's chimney! I guess you didn't hear it, bein' back here out of the way and all. It'll be talk for weeks, and the common room full, and that's for sure!"

If you pause and look around invitingly, your players may volunteer their characters' comments, such as "What happened?" or "What's the matter?" Give the players a chance to role play their reactions, then go on reading.

When Nob calms down a little, he tells you that there was a big fire in the middle of the night! Flames erupted from Heather Groundsel's chimney, and everyone within shouting distance turned out to try to help. It turns out that only the soot burned, with no damage done, but there was high excitement for a while. If the players join the crowd in the common room they will hear more about it, and have a fine breakfast besides.

Nob continues: "The common room is already full and a-buzz with talk, if you want to hear more come quick, and grab your breakfast whiles you listen." With that, Nob is off down the hallway.

THE PRANCING PONY



Try to get assent from your players that their characters will go to the common room. If they do not, they will have to eat their own rations or go hungry. The Shirriff will seek them out, and you will need to adapt the text accordingly — such as by having the local tavern-goers follow the Shirriff into the parlor and give the PCs the essential information.

The important points are: 1) follow the trail from Storch Hill that parallels the road, and 2) avoid the Forsaken Inn.

- *If the characters go to the common room, go to stage 4.*
- *If the characters stay in their rooms, go to stage 5.*

4

As he leads your party down the maze of halls, Nob says “Your uncle sent mushrooms, Tolman, great stacks of them! I wish I was you, havin’ your breakfast. And there’s fried eggs, lots o’ them, and fresh apple fritters and potatoes with fern fiddle-heads, and turnips with daylily flowers!” He rubs his round belly appreciatively, then pushes open the heavy door to the smoky common room. He gestures to a table set for you in the center of the room.

Breakfast can be merry and the description brief, with lots of additional congratulations. But it is marred by the local malcontents grumbling about sleepyhead big shots with strange friends lazing through the morning and not being there when needed.

“Youse was slow enuf comin’. What if the whole town caught fire? You and your fancy friends paradin’ around, actin’ like heroes — what heroes? Jail breaks, stayin’ with furriners, countin’ up the treasure ’stead o’ headin’ out after them bandits...”

A sympathetic local (Henry Reedpipe, who runs the general store) can reassure the party that everyone knows that Heather Groundsel was too tight to have her chimney cleaned. The soot must have been building up for years.

During the conversation, throw in other comments interspersed with pithy Bree sayings. Possible phrases include: “Having no wish to tread on your corns, as we say in Bree,” or “And a crusty, nasty, testy lot they are, too!” and “tallowbright the fire was.”

- *Go to stage 6.*

5

A little while after Nob leaves, Shirriff Bunce comes to the door to persuade the characters to join the gathering in the common room.

“Evenin’ Tolman, goodfolk. Everyone’s waitin’ in the common room for you folk. I know you must be tired, but you can come on down and eat a solid breakfast, tell the story again, and then head back to bed.

“I also want to talk to you about this Inledair and whether you, being the most experienced at this kind of thing, could go see if something could be done about him. From talking to Gil and Nat, it sounds like the best place to start is at the lookout on Storch Hill. I gathered up some rations to get you out on the road. If you would just come along and reassure folks now, I’d be real obliged.”

If the characters still don’t want to come to the common room, the Shirriff will get very persuasive, mentioning the fire and the jailbreak. He will also point out Butterbur’s generosity, and the responsibilities of strangers to act above-board.

However, he will not force the characters to come against their will. He will leave them alone but not before they agree to go after the bandits. It is possible that the characters decided to pursue Inledair at the end of “DAWN COMES EARLY” in which case no persuasion is necessary.

If he needs to, Shirriff Bunce will deputize the party and then order them to go after Inledair. If the players need a refresher, the information Nat and Gil gave about Inledair is repeated below. If the party did not question Nat or Gil, the Shirriff can give them the information now.

- *If the characters stay in their rooms all morning, go to SCENE 2: BANDIT TRACKS on page 15.*
- *Otherwise go to stage 7.*

GM NOTE

Gil and Nat gave the following information when questioned by Shirriff Bunce. It is the same information the party would have received near the end of "DAWN COMES EARLY."

- Nat and Gil are working with some bandits who attack travellers on the Great East Road.
- The pair notifies the highwaymen of particularly rich victims who will be passing their way.
- Nat and Gil also sell some of the stolen goods obtained by the bandits in return for a small commission.
- They supply the bandits with goods from town to fill any gaps in their stolen acquisitions.
- Every two weeks, the pair goes to Storch Hill, the appointed meeting place, to accomplish the actions noted above.
- They think the bandits have a larger headquarters somewhere southeast of Storch Hill.
- The most recent instruction was for Nat and Gil to preserve the Troll menace for as long as possible. (The more the Bree-landers were preoccupied with the Trolls, the less attention they could give to reports of missing caravans, etc.) They were also told to move the Trolls closer to town.
- The judicious placement of fireworks in the Troll-hole by Gil resulted in the Trolls' removal to the bridge; once there, the Trolls liked the change.

Of course Nat and Gil weren't telling everything. They insisted that they did not know the location of the bandit lair, but they are lying. It's in the Trollshaws, a two weeks journey east. Nor would they admit that they have been there.

6

After the party has had a chance to eat and the talk has died down, Shirriff Bunce rises to address Tolman and his friends publicly.

"You lads and lasses 'ev done right well, (side-ways glance at the Dwarf and Elves) and your friends, too. We're all grateful that the Trolls will bother us no more, but this Inledair and his bandits are still loose, right? We won't rest easy in our beds 'til the roads around Bree are safe. Now you folk done more than your share, but you are the most experienced folk in town for this kind of work, and I was hoping that you might just have a go at the bandits. We put together some packs for you to make the journey light, some mutton, and bread and even one of Mrs. Bunce's apple pies. Should be enough food for four or five days. What ya say?"

The Shirriff will get fairly persuasive until the characters agree to go after the bandits. No one can sleep nights with attacks on their very doorstep. He can give each character a day's fresh food and has scraped up three more days' dried food for each PC, mostly cheese and last year's parsnips.

Other townfolk will also offer supplies for the brave adventurers, so they will be ready to face the bandits. When the offers are done, the party should have two weeks worth of rations, some rope, and some torches to light their way.

If the party asks for other supplies normally available in town they will be given freely. Expensive items like horses and new cloaks can be bought for a reasonable price, but odd items like lock picks and grapnels cannot be had. A brief list of prices in Bree is included in the boxed section below.

Gil and Nat have been apprehended, but have confessed only to meeting with the bandits behind those stones on top of Storch Hill, just south of town. They informed the Shirriff that they have the impression that the bandits' hideout is south of the road — they always left along that trail. Another local can remember seeing the faint trail running up that hill and paralleling the Road going east. Maybe Nat and Gil use the trail (mayhap even the Bandits themselves, those bloodthirsty scalawags — as imagination runs wild — watching for merchants.)

- *Go to stage 7.*

PRICES IN BREE

The party will have some time to buy equipment before they leave in search of Inledair and his band. Much of what they need will be freely given by the grateful townsfolk, but rare and expensive items will need to be purchased. Below is a price list for use in Bree. It does not include inexpensive items but if the party wishes to buy those items in a later adventure, their costs can be determined by the GM based on the cost of items below. Remember that rare items can not be had in quantity, and if the characters buy a lot of something the price is liable to go up.

Battle axe	13 sp
Broadsword	10 sp
Composite bow	17 sp
Crossbow	25 sp
Long bow	10 sp
Morningstar	16 sp
War hammer	15 sp
Boiled leather armor	10 sp
Chain armor (rare)	35 sp
Plate armor	not available
Mule	32 sp
Pony	40 sp
Light horse	45 sp
Saddle and bridle	25 sp
Tent	2 sp
Bedroll	1 sp
Ale, quart	1 sp
Tobacco	2 sp
Wool cloak	10 sp
Wool hose	9 sp
Hammer	8 sp
Hacksaw	12 sp
Screwdriver	7 sp
Pliers	9 sp
Pulley	15 sp
Parchment	5 sp
Ink vial	15 sp
Quill	1 sp

The other patrons at *The Pony* continue talking and speculating about the bandits. Particularly vocal is Arn Sandytoes. Arn has always been known for longwinded discussions of things he would never want to see firsthand.

"Yep, sure and they'd go along the far side of the Road. They wouldn't dast use it openly, and if they went through the woods around Combe, one of our bright lads or lasses 'ud be sure to spot them. And no one in their right mind would go through the Midgewater, with its insects and its mud to hold the print of a hobnailed boot."

"You remember, Arn, there's that inn about a day's walk east of here," says Stef Underchin. "Mebbe they should go there and ask for particulars."

"Nah, Stef," Arn replies. He leans over and takes a wooden spill from the mug of them on the table. After holding it to a candle, he lights his pipe and draws on it, coughing gently. "Folk do say that the Forsaken Inn is no fit place for a weary traveller. The food is kind of thin and sour and all. The mattresses are that flea-ridden you'd best take a sheep with you to draw them, they say, and the public room so fearsome with surly types and cutpurses that you'd best keep a watch all night."

"That's right. I was forgettin' that last party through — you remember them gold-grabbin' Dwarves — beggin' your pardon sir. They said they wanted to camp in the good clean thickets south of the Road. Said his cousin or somethin' stayed at the inn and he's not been heard from since."

"I don't guess you coulda set out last night — too dark to follow tracks, and if you used a torch the bandits could see you 5 miles off on these downs. Besides 'a good nights sleep and a fresh start for an important journey' as my pappy used to say. Best o' luck to ya this mornin' though!"

• Go to SCENE 2: BANDIT TRACKS.



GM NOTE

If the PCs are reluctant to chase bandits after this pressuring, the Shirriff can mention with embarrassment the fact that some folks are angry they didn't help with the chimney fire. Naturally he understands, but still and all...

If necessary to persuade the PC's, a party of Elves, Dwarves, or a Ranger can show up at the inn. They have injuries, after a narrow escape with bandits. The bandits attacked from the thickets south of the East Road.

If this is still not enough, Shirriff Bunce will follow the characters back to their room and deputize them into service, then order them out

after Inledair. He will also tell them all he has learned from Nat and Gil.

The Bandits attack from south of the Road to give the false impression that their lair is located to the south. The bandits have found that those who spend the night south of the Road sometimes disappear, though they have not pinpointed the area where this occurs.

Privileged GM information: a Barrow-wight preys on the area south of the Forsaken Inn. The main reason that such a ill-reputed place as the inn finds customers, is that camping in the area is even more hazardous.



see you've some decent trackers among you to have gotten this far," says Strider. "But night is coming on, and a storm too, by the look of things. You'd best seek shelter soon, and be ready for a wet night. We're out of the general area for Barrow-wights, but I'll give my advice anyway: Do not linger near standing stones!"

• THREE •

SCENE 2: BANDIT TRACKS



Setting off to find and defeat a Bandit-king is a good deal different than chasing Trolls that live near town. The party has no way of knowing how long they will be gone or what they will find along the way. Planning is a crucial step in any adventure in the wilderness.

As the party leaves the common room, ask them what preparations, if any they wish to make before setting out.

As the players plan their journey, note which topics are covered. Following are some ideas that should be addressed and *experience point* awards for the PC who makes each suggestion.

- Will they set out immediately or spend the day packing and leave the next morning? If they wait they are less likely to forget things and will have more daylight to pursue the trail, but word of Nat and Gil's arrest is more likely to have reached Inledair. (*Experience Points: 5*)
- Will the party take horses and ponies to ride? This will make them faster, but may limit the terrain they can cross. Besides horses and fodder bear a price. (*Experience Points: 6*)
- What about a pack mule? It can cross almost any terrain, but it is not quick or quiet and leaves a noticeable trail. The comments about money and fodder also apply to a mule. (*Experience Points: 7*)
- How much food will they need? If they expect more than a two-day journey, some of their food should be dried or concentrated. Although there is game available on the downs, hunting takes time and may expose them to the bandits. A brief discussion of the vagaries of foraging is covered in the GM Note on page 16. (*Experience Points: 5*)
- What special equipment should they take? Will they need a hacksaw or a screwdriver to sneak into the bandit's lair? Spikes to hold open a door? Ropes to scale a cliff or a wall? Some way to draw a map? Spare weapons? The list is endless, but the characters will eventually run out of ideas, money, or the ability to carry their supplies. Each item of special equipment suggested should be worth 1 *experience point*.
- What about the Trolls' treasure? The bandits are likely to hear of it and come looking for the party and their new found wealth. Should they leave it at the Greenthumbs' or carry it with them? Maybe Shirriff Bunce would watch it for them? (*Experience Points: 4*)
- After the party has finished planning their journey in search of the bandits' lair, go to stage 2.

GM NOTE

In "DARKER THAN THE DARKNESS," Strider helps the adventurers find their way in the wilderness, and Rilwen's direction sense makes it very unlikely that the characters will become badly lost. Yet, the characters may choose to do some foraging to add fresh food to their diets or to extend the rations they brought from town.

Water

Water is most easily available in the form of streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds. Rivers and lakes are large landmarks and should only be found where they appear on maps of Middle-earth. The characters will only run across a large body of water if they happen to wander in the right direction.

Streams and ponds occur more frequently, and many do not appear on maps. The GM should determine how likely either body of water is to be found and inform the party when they discover it.

In the downs around Bree, there is a fair amount of rain, and streams are frequent. The limestone absorbs standing water, so ponds are very rare. If the PCs are looking for water and travelling in a straight line, the party should cross a stream every ten miles or so. Streams are placed in contours of land and not every so many miles like irrigation ditches. Have one player roll the dice for every two miles the party moves. On a roll of 2, the party has found a stream; on a 3 they have found a rivulet.

The GM should note these small streams on his map as the party may pass this way again and will be surprised if the streams are in different places.

Another reliable source of water in most of Middle earth is rain. Although rain may not come often enough in Harad to keep a man alive, in Bree storms are less rare. The hardest part of collecting rain water is containing it. If a storm drops three inches of rain and your collecting bucket is a mug, you now have half a mug of water to last until the next storm. Since a human drinks at least one gallon of water a day, the half mug is not enough. Helmets and shields, if placed properly, can hold some water, and rags can be allowed to soak through and then be rung out into a bucket or helm. Water skins or some other carrying method is also necessary to store water until the next rain.

"DARKER THAN THE DARKNESS" takes place during the early summer. This means that on any given day, there is a 15% chance of rain (a roll of 1 on a 6-sided dice).

Food

Food can be plant or animal matter. In unfamiliar country it is best to only forage by hunting and trapping. This is because many plants are poisonous and may resemble their edible cousins from other areas.

The GM will determine the frequency and type of game in any given area, but unless it is large (like buffalo or wild sheep), it may be very hard to catch enough to live on. Rangers will be skilled at trapping as will anyone from an area where trapping is a major part of the economy. (Bree is not a trapping community, nor is Rivendell.) Trapping is also only useful if the PCs are remaining in one area for a time. If they are travelling, they will never be able to check their traps.

Hunting is possible during travel, but it slows movement by half. Rangers gain a +2 bonus on all of the rolls involved in hunting. This reflects their knowledge of animals and general ease in the wilderness. A *Perception*Δ9 maneuver is needed to locate tracks. This may be modified for areas rich or poor in game. A *Subterfuge*Δ9 is required to stalk the quarry and get close enough for a shot. Use the Combat Table to see if the animal is hit.

Small animals such as rabbits and birds are felled by any successful hit. For larger game, the GM must determine the animal's *Endurance*. When tracking wounded animals, every 20% loss of *Endurance* will lower the animal's *Movement* by one. A 10% loss of *Endurance* will provide a blood trail, so *Perception* maneuvers need not be made to follow the animal.

Edible plants will be known to Rangers in a given area. Visiting Rangers must spend two weeks with someone familiar with the flora in order to learn to recognize it. Other characters may make a special study of edible plants in an area if they wish, but their aptitude will vary, and it should take several weeks to acquire the knowledge.

In the downs in summer, locating wild food plants is easy enough to be an *activity*, although it slows movement by half.

As the party sets off to find Inledair, describe their departure.

You leave Bree through the East-gate, relieved that Nat and Gil are in the lockhouse. The day is sunny and cool, a lovely day for a long hike. Birds sing and a gentle breeze blows as you walk along. You have no trouble locating the bandit's look-out on top of Storch Hill.

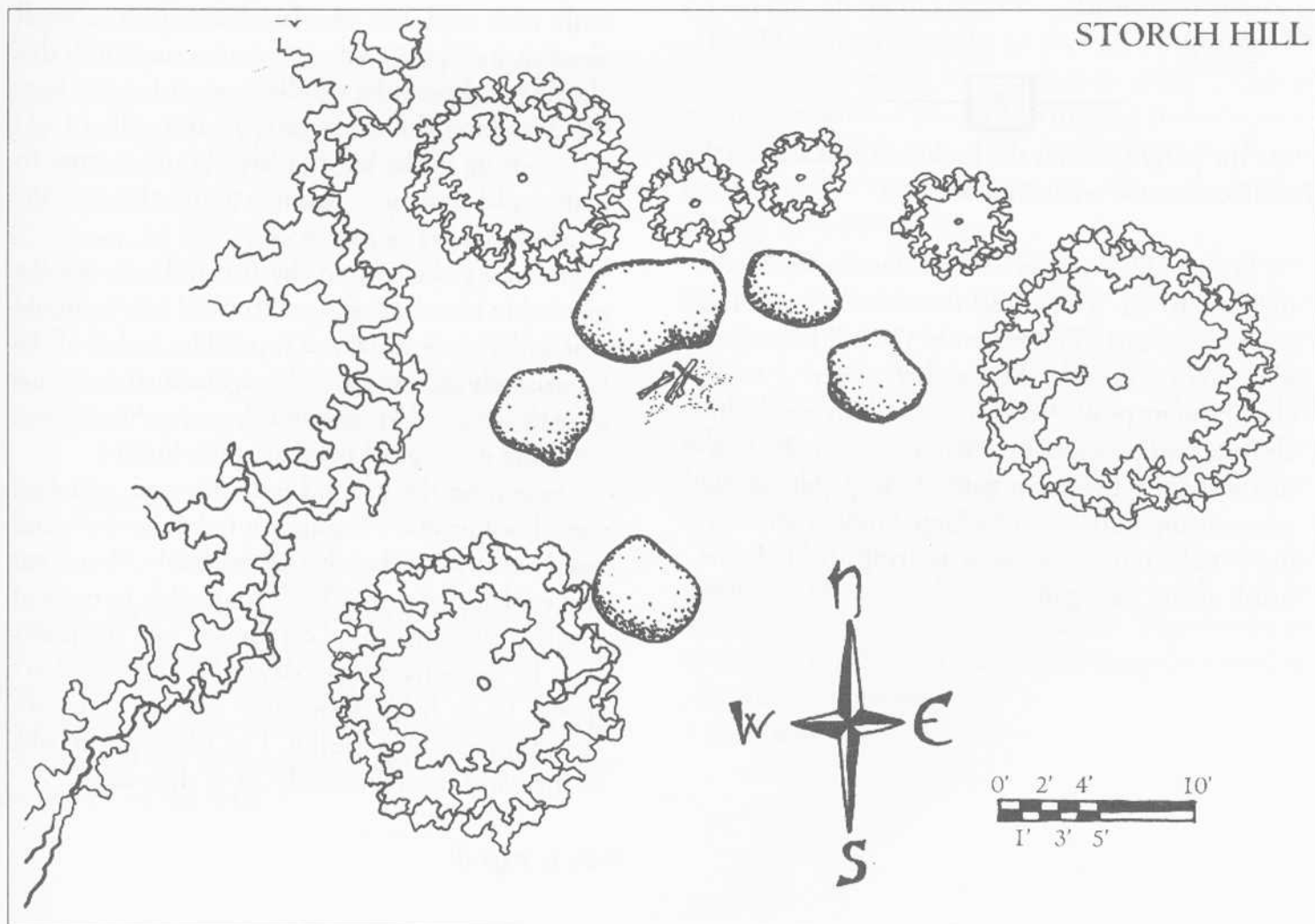
As the characters examine the lookout post on Storch Hill, have each make a *Perception* maneuver. The PC with the highest score determines how much information the party is able to gain from the site.

- If the best maneuver in the party is 7 or less, go to stage 3.
- If the best maneuver in the party is 8 or 9, go to stage 4.
- If the best maneuver in the party is 10 or 11, go to stage 5.
- If the best maneuver in the party is 12 or 13, go to stage 6.
- If the best maneuver in the party is 14 or more, go to stage 7.

As the party searches the lookout for traces of the bandits, describe what they see.

Storch Hill is a low chalk hill south of Bree and the East Road. Trails lead towards the road and away to the east. The crown of the hill is covered with trees and low shrubs that screen a small clearing at its peak. A ring of stones surrounds this clearing and provides excellent cover for any bandits watching the town gate. A deep pile of old ashes sitting in the lee of a large boulder attest to many cold mornings spent peering through the brush at the East-gate.

- Go to stage 8.



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As you poke around the fire and examine the ground in the clearing, you stumble across an old nail and a piece of frayed rope. The nail is of the type usually used in horseshoes, but there is no clue as to the original function of the rope. At only five feet long, its original uses are quite limited.

• Go to stage 8.

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Searching the ground near the trail, you find some hoof prints. They appear to be those of a full-sized horse, so the bandits are probably Men. That also explains how they react so quickly to news of wealthy caravans.

• Go to stage 8.

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Searching the ground near the trail, you find some hoof prints. They appear to be those of a full sized horse, so the bandits are probably Men. That also explains how they react so quickly to news of wealthy caravans. Based on the last rain the prints can't be more than three days old, but they don't appear to be fresh. Hopefully you were not observed approaching the hill. The ashes appear cold, so the bandits are probably all at their lair.

• Go to stage 8.

As the party searches the lookout for traces of the bandits, describe what they see.

Storch Hill is a low chalk hill south of Bree and the East Road. Trails lead towards the road and away to the east. The crown of the hill is covered with trees and low shrubs that screen a small clearing at its peak. A ring of stones surrounds this clearing and provides excellent cover for any bandits watching the town gate. A deep pile of old ashes sitting in the lee of a large boulder attest to many cold mornings spent peering through the brush at the Bree's East-gate.

As you poke around the fire and examine the ground in the clearing, you stumble across an old nail and a piece of frayed rope. The nail is of the type usually used in horseshoes, but there is no clue as to the original function of the rope. At only five feet long its original uses are quite limited.

Examining the ground around the east trail, you find the prints of a horse not more than three days old, but not fresh. The bandits definitely have horses, but at least they weren't manning the lookout as you walked up.

There are also several boot prints in the lee of the boulder around the old camp fires, where they have been shielded from the rains. From the prints you can see that at least four different humans have occupied the hill in the past. None of the footprints would match Gil's or Nat's feet. You don't know how many bandits there are, but there are at least four. Getting all of them may not be easy.

• Go to stage 8.

As the party heads down the eastern trail, describe their journey briefly. Expand the following description only if the players state that their characters are looking for something particular. In any case no more information can be obtained about the bandits from the marks on the trail.

The countryside has low rolling hills, some little more than mounds. The chalky soil is scattered with small stones, heaths and furze. Depressions bear grasses, low shrubs, and an occasional small tree. If you watch your feet you should have no trouble with walking. How are you arranged — single file, spread out, or in loose groups? Who is in front?

Note the order in which the characters travel. Here it is not very important, but sometimes you will have an ambush or other surprise planned for the party. Then you will need to know where all of the party members are, but if you only ask for a marching order when you have a surprise, you will always give it away. This way your surprises will find the party unprepared.

Have each player roll for attempting a *Movement maneuver*. If PCs are in single or double file, those in front should roll for a *Movement*Δ6, for an *Easy maneuver*. PCs who are following someone roll a *Movement*Δ5 (Very Easy) *maneuver*. If the PCs are spread out, all should roll for a *Movement*Δ6 *maneuver*.

If a PC fails the roll, he or she takes one point of damage from falling or twisting an ankle. (This is intended as kind of practice on making and interpreting rolls as well as an activity for the morning. It can be omitted if it's too basic in terms of how much your players have learned.)

If the Ranger chooses to go in front of the main party by at least a quarter mile, she can roll a *Perception*Δ3 *maneuver* to notice some coneys. If they think of it, you may have the Ranger shoot at the coneys for food. The coneys' DB is -2, but any hit kills them. The coneys will flee out of range after the first round of combat, so the PC will only get one shot to add fresh meat to the group's rations.

Remember that if the characters stop to discuss the merits of shooting the rabbits, their lunch will be alerted and leap off into the distance. This should be a warning for the party that sometimes they need to act without planning.

• Go to stage 9.

Continue to describe the terrain through which the PCs are walking.

As you walk, your character has a chance to glance around. What tends to catch a person's attention is the kind of thing that they are interested in. Warriors will analyze the landscape for defensible positions, for example. Rangers will be alert for wildlife.

Gláin, you feel very secure and comfortable. Most of the vegetation takes the form of low grasses and turf — it would be difficult for an enemy to ambush you here.

Lily and Tolman also feel at home. They've roamed the downs close to Bree at will, throughout their childhood. The scenery is reassuringly familiar.

Rilwen and Tatharína, you both are enjoying the abundance of wildlife. Near the path, some brownish mushrooms are growing among the stones and harebells. Each of the mushrooms is only about two inches tall, brown with a spattering of white dots. They grow in clusters of a dozen or so in the shade of some of the boulders and the few low shrubs.

Ask each Ranger (Tatharína, due to her training, may also roll) to roll for a *Perception*Δ5 (Light) maneuver. Those who succeed recognize that the Blewit mushrooms are edible and would provide one meal for the whole group. The mushrooms can be gathered in 20 minutes, an amount of time not significant in this part of the adventure.

Those who miss the roll did not identify the mushrooms or did not think about their uses. Warriors and Scouts should not have been trained in identifying wild fungi. It is a very exacting art and a single mistake is often fatal.

• Go to stage 10.

Continue describing the hike.

The day warms as the sun sails higher into the sky. Soon the sun is high overhead, and you are getting tired and hungry, especially the Hobbits. You enter a pleasant hollow with a few large boulders, a good size to sit on.

If no player takes these broad hints, you may need to say "Did you want to stop for lunch?" If no one does, make a note so that the PCs will *Take Damage* if they do not eat for a day, as noted in *The Guidelines* on page 22.

Do the characters set a watch while they stop for lunch? Do they light a fire to heat the food? If they light a fire, note the thin plume of smoke rising high in the still air. Characters who make a *Perception*Δ6 maneuver will realize that the smoke is probably visible for several miles.

• Go to stage 11.

While they eat, or continue walking, ask all Bards to make a *Perception*Δ8 roll. If they succeed, they notice that a lichen growing nearby is valuable in the treatment of sword wounds. In 5 minutes they can collect enough Heatherbranch Lichen to cause the healing of 3 separate wounds to increase by 1 point per hour.

Ask Warriors to make a *Perception*Δ9 roll. If they make it, they catch a glimpse of a brown-haired human ducking over a hill a quarter mile ahead.

• If any of the characters rush forward to examine the area, go to stage 12.

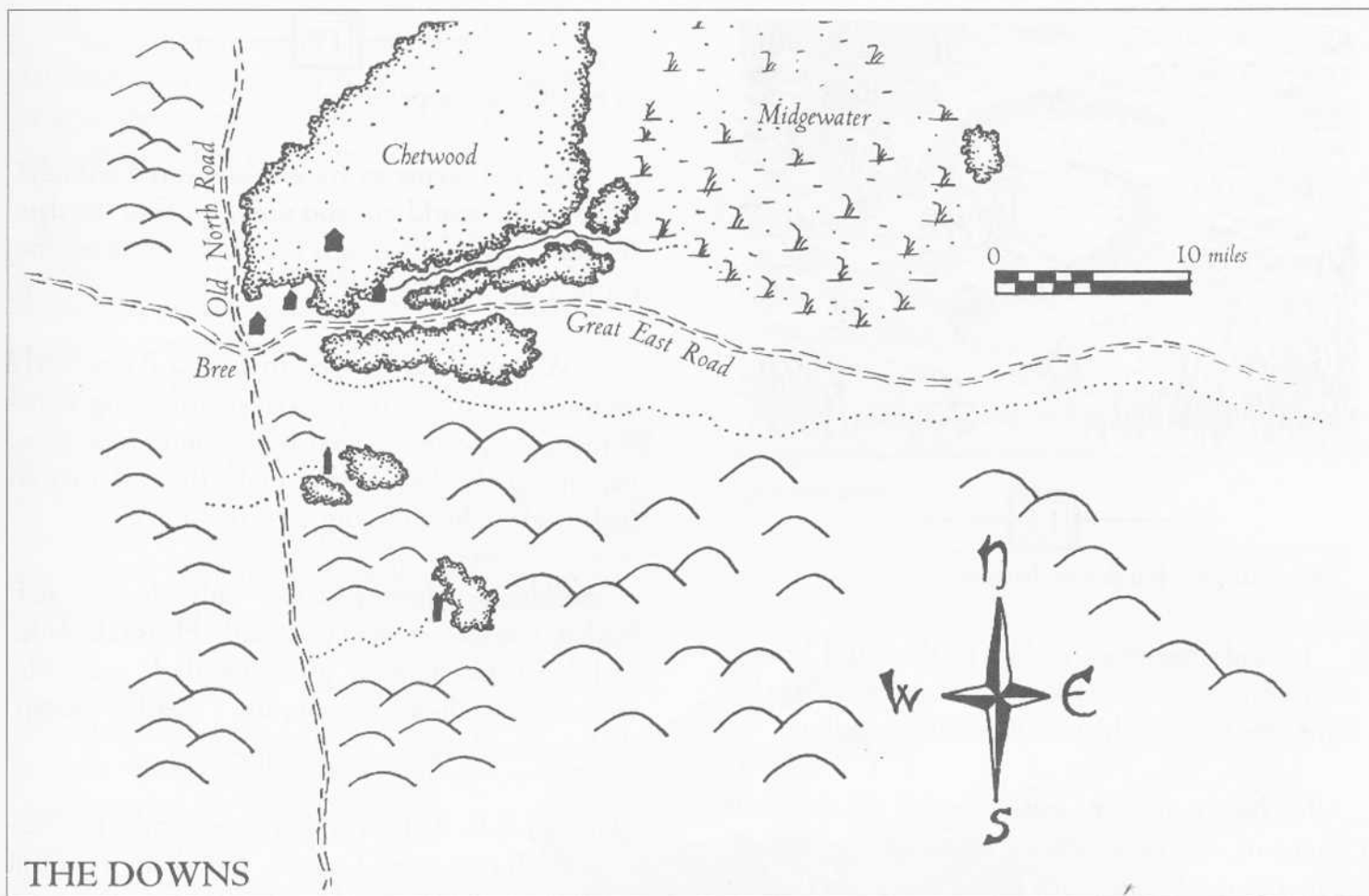
• Otherwise, go to stage 14.

Fast as you move, the man moves faster. Ducking behind a boulder, he mounts his horse and you see him ride away. Left in the dust, you look around for evidence as to the man's identity.

Allow the PCs to make a *Perception*Δ8 maneuver.

• If they succeed, go to stage 13.

• Otherwise, go to stage 14.



I3

The only clue is that the prints of his horse show a spot where one of the nails is missing.

This is Damah, one of the bandits, in fact the very one whose horse lost a nail at the look-out post on Storch Hill. He was as startled by the party as they were approaching, and he ran off at once. Luckily, he does not know the party's intentions, and will not warn Inledair of them. The party will meet Damah again in the next adventure: "*Bad Men, Full O' Thievery.*"

• Go to stage 15.

I4

You can find nothing that will tell you who the man was or why he was here. Hopefully he was not one of the bandits.

This is Damah, one of the bandits, in fact the very one whose horse lost a nail at the look-out post on Storch Hill. He was as startled by the party as they were approaching, and he ran off at once. Luckily, he does not know the party's intentions, and will not warn Inledair of them. The party will meet Damah again in the next adventure: "*Bad Men, Full O' Thievery.*"

• Go to stage 15.



15

The trail gets harder to follow:

In mid-afternoon, a shift in the wind brings cooler air, and clouds roll in from the west. As the light gets poorer, the trail is harder to follow.

All players may make a *Perception*Δ9 maneuver, with a bonus of +2 for Rangers because of their greater experience outdoors. If any player succeeds, the trail is found, and the PCs can proceed. Note any *experience points* down to be totaled and awarded at the end of this adventure.

- If no one succeeds, the trail is lost. Go to stage 17.
- If the trail is found, go to stage 16, below.

16

The track has begun to twist and turn to avoid low thickets. The sky is darker, and the ground between bushes is stony and bare. The trail is even harder to follow. This time only Rangers may make a *Perception*Δ11 (Very Hard) maneuver.

If the trail is lost and any player suggests retracing the trail and looking for a turn, or looking in widening circles, or any similar technique, allow another perception maneuver at *Perception*Δ9 for the player(s) making the suggestion(s) and the Rangers.

- If the trail is still lost, go to stage 17.
- If it is found, go to stage 18.

17

The PCs are hopelessly lost.

The trail seems to have disappeared entirely! How in the world are you going to find Inledair from the vague directions Gil and Nat gave concerning the bandits' lair?

Ask Warriors and Rangers to make a *Perception*Δ13 maneuver to see if they notice a rugged-looking human 50 feet away, camouflaged by an outcropping and low, scraggly bushes. If they make the roll, they see Strider before he steps out into the open.

Suddenly, where you saw only shadow and bushes, you see a man in your path. He is tall, dark, and hawk-faced, with gleaming dark eyes. He wears high, well-worn boots and a weather-beaten dark green cloak.

This is J.R.R. Tolkien's character, Strider the Ranger. He will recognize Tolman, and Gláin if present. He may have seen Gallind and Rilwen at a distance in Rivendell. In the following section, adapt what Strider says to the PCs you have present. That is, read the part in which he greets Gláin only if Gláin is present; and read his acknowledgement of Elves (Fair Folk), only if any are in your party. To make this clearer, the greeting for these people will be set off in parentheses.

"Hail, gentlefolk!" exclaims Strider in a deep rich voice, for indeed it is he. ("Tolman the Finder, have you lost something, your trail for example? And Gláin, how is your beard, may it grow ever longer? Ah, I see Fair Folk among you. I think I may have glimpsed you in Elrond's porch, of a darkling summer evening.")

"For those of you to whom I have not been introduced — folk hereabout call me Strider. Well met! And what are your names?"

Encourage the players to introduce their PCs. Then read the following.

"Are you indeed lost?" Strider asks. "You are far from any dwelling, with a storm coming on. My time is short, but I can spare some words if you wish them. Can I be of any help?"

Allow the PCs to discuss their concerns.

If Strider is asked about the bandits, he will say that he has been elsewhere for a time. He has heard of the bandits, but knows only that they attack from south of the Great East Road, somewhere to the east.

Strider will assume the PCs are lost even if they don't admit it. If they are polite, and admit they are lost, his tone will be gentle. If not, he will guide them back to the bandit trail in the same words, but his tone will be scornful, sardonic.

Strider continues, "It's not difficult to get lost here. These downs can be tricky. Only the barest clues survive. See, here is a fresh scratch from a hobnail — there the lichen is bruised, and there."

"But I am amusing myself — you do not need to restart your trail here. Much clearer tracks start by the standing stone yonder, where the ground is lower and softer. Take care not to linger overlong in the shadow of that or any standing stone! Strange things can happen in this land, as I am sure you have heard in tales, and the clouds foretell a wet night."

"I would help you follow this trail, but that I am overdue for an important appointment." Strider smiles wryly, as if he is afraid you will think that he looks too disreputable to have an important appointment.

"If you are seeking shelter from the storm, follow the trail but a little ways and you will come to a place where it appears that stone has been quarried. Although I have never camped there, it seems safe enough and will offer some protection from the rain."

"Well, wet night or no, I have miles to travel before I can rest. Fare thee well, and remember not to shelter near standing stones no matter how strong the storm."

Strider walks back in the direction you have come from. When you next look back, he has disappeared.



The storm will be fierce, and if the party camps in the open, their goods will be drenched and most of their provisions ruined. If Strider leaves and the party suggests stopping before the shelter he recommended, the GM or an NPC may have to repeat the previous comments. (If the players still insist on camping here, assume that this is Hir Rusark's porch and go to SCENE 3: SKELETON CREW on page 27.)

• Now, go to stage 19.

Ask Warriors and Rangers to make a *Perception* Δ13 roll to see if they notice Strider at 50 feet away, camouflaged by an outcropping and low, scraggly bushes. If they make the roll, they see Strider before he steps out onto the trail.

Suddenly, where you saw only shadow and bushes, you see a man about fifty feet away. He is tall, dark, with aquiline features and gleaming dark eyes. He wears tall, well-worn boots and a weather-beaten green cloak.

This is Tolkien's character, Strider the Ranger. Strider will recognize Tolman, and Gláin if present. He may have seen Gallind and Rilwen at a distance in Rivendell. In the following section, adapt what Strider says to the PCs you have present. That is, read the part in which he greets Gláin only if Gláin is present; and read his acknowledgement of Elves (Fair Folk), only if any are in your party. To make this clearer, the greeting for these people will be set off in parentheses.

"Hail, neighbors!" exclaims Strider in a deep rich voice, for indeed it is he. ("Tolman the Finder, do I find you well? And Gláin, how is your beard, may it grow ever longer? Ah, I see Fair Folk among you. I think I may have glimpsed you in Elrond's porch, of a darkling summer evening.")

"For those of you to whom I have not been introduced — folk hereabout call me Strider. Well met! And what are your names?"

Encourage the players to introduce their PCs. Then read the following.

Strider says "You are far from any dwelling, with a storm coming on. My time is short, but I can spare some words if you wish them. Can I be of any help?"

Allow the PCs to discuss their concerns.

If Strider is asked about the bandits, he will say that he has been elsewhere for a time. He has heard of the bandits, but knows only that they attack from south of the Old Road, somewhere to the east.

If the characters mention their difficulty in following the trail, he can tell them that it gets easier over by the standing stone, but not to linger there. He can warn them to look for shelter. There's not much in this area, but the wind is coming from the southwest, and there's a slight shelter in the hill a little ways on. He hasn't used it himself, but it's out of the area made dangerous by Barrow-wights, and the storm may be fierce.

Read Strider's parting words aloud.

"Take care not to linger overlong in the shadow of any standing stone!" Strider continues. "Strange things can happen in this land, as I am sure you have heard in tales, and the clouds foretell a wet night."

"I would help you follow this trail, but that I am overdue for an important appointment." Strider smiles wryly, as if he is afraid you will think that he looks too disreputable to have an important appointment.

"If you are seeking shelter from the storm, follow the trail but a little ways and you will come to a place where it appears that stone has been quarried. Although I have never camped there it seems safe enough and will offer some protection from the rain."

Strider says "Well, wet night or no, I have miles to cover before I can rest. Fare thee well, and remember not to shelter near standing stones, no matter how strong the storm."

Strider walks back in the direction you have come from. When you next look back, he has disappeared.

The storm will be fierce, and if the party camps in the open, their goods will be drenched and most of their provisions ruined. If Strider leaves and the party suggests stopping before the shelter he recommended, the GM or an NPC may need to repeat the previous comments. (If the players still insist on camping here, assume that this is Hir Rusark's porch and go to SCENE 3: SKELETON CREW on page 27.)

• Now go to stage 19.

It feels as though you have been fighting this storm for hours although it has been less than half an hour since you passed shelter. With the night coming on and your eyes blinded by the rain, you have lost all sign of the trail. Even Rilwen's direction sense seems to have failed you.

Make a *Magical maneuver*.

It's a *Magical* $\Delta 18$ maneuver, but the players shouldn't know that. Nor does it allow the PCs to avoid Hir Rusark's barrow entirely. Rather, it fixes who the Wight drains of life first! (Note the totals rolled by the players — you'll need the info in the next scene.)

• Now, go to stage 22.

22

As you stumble blindly forward the storm seems to lighten briefly, and you see a hollow in a hillside up ahead.

The hollow offers some protection from the storm, but it seems vaguely familiar. Wait, this is the same hollow you left twenty minutes ago! You have been travelling in circles while growing ever more tired. Will you stop and wait out the storm or try to continue onward?

If the party continues fighting the storm, they must make another set of *Strength* $\Delta 12$ and *Movement* $\Delta 10$ maneuvers with a -1 penalty for exhaustion. If they succeed, they continue to struggle through the storm for 20 minutes before arriving again at the hollow, led in circles by the Wight's power. Each time the characters fight the storm they get an additional -1 to their *Strength* and *Movement* maneuvers until they collapse on the porch in exhaustion.

• Go to stage 23.

23

If the PCs stopped in the hollow, rather than pushing on through the storm until exhaustion claimed them, allow them to set up camp. The rain and the darkness make this difficult, but possible. Then, even if they set a watch, all succumb to slumber. Go to the next scene on page 27.

If they kept on through the storm, describe events as the PCs collapse in exhaustion.



You feel exhausted. The effort to move seems too much to attempt. Your eyelids insist on closing, and all your muscles feel as heavy as bags of sand, bags with all the sand trickling out. The rumble of thunder begins to sound comforting, like the heavy sound of wooden wheels on farm-carts during market-day.

As the sun sets, it finds its way to the edge of the cloud cover and peeps through. The slanting rays highlight stones running north from the hollow in the hill. Covered with lichen, bathed blood-red in the waning light, they seem to be the remains of a double row of standing stones. Some are missing, some are standing, most are toppled in one direction or another. They look like stones that once lined a triumphal procession-way. Or like rotten teeth.

Later. Later will be soon enough to try to wake up and remember. What was it Strider said? It doesn't matter. Nothing matters. Nothing matters . . . but . . . sleep . . .

• Turn to page 27 for SCENE 3: SKELETON CREW.



ower! Gold!" Hir Rusark the Barrow-wight mutters in his cold mound. "Even after death I hold them, and Dargar defends my eternal keep."

"Whenever I feel life near, I stir. I stir, I defend, I take what they have, their treasure, their life force, and so I still live. I live, and they shall die!" The voice trails off into a fit of maniacal laughter

• FOUR •

SCENE 3: SKELETON CREW



All of the PCs have fallen victim to tiredness, a wild storm, and the call of a Barrow-wight, Hir Rusark Johardur III. The Wight's spell throws them into deep sleep. Dargar, his skeletal servant, drags them into the mound and lays them in a silent row, unable to move.

Dargar the skeleton keeps watch, and is about to drag one of the PCs into the inner chamber, where Hir Rusark can slowly absorb his life force. Without revealing it to the players, look at the GM map, page 28, for an overview of the scene.

Then read the following aloud.

Your eyes are closed. You cannot move. You feel as heavy as lead.

It seems to be a long time later. At any rate, your clothes have dried. Leather armor feels stiff. You hear a voice like howling in the distance. Like a lonely winter wind trying to find its way into a warm cottage, the voice drones on.

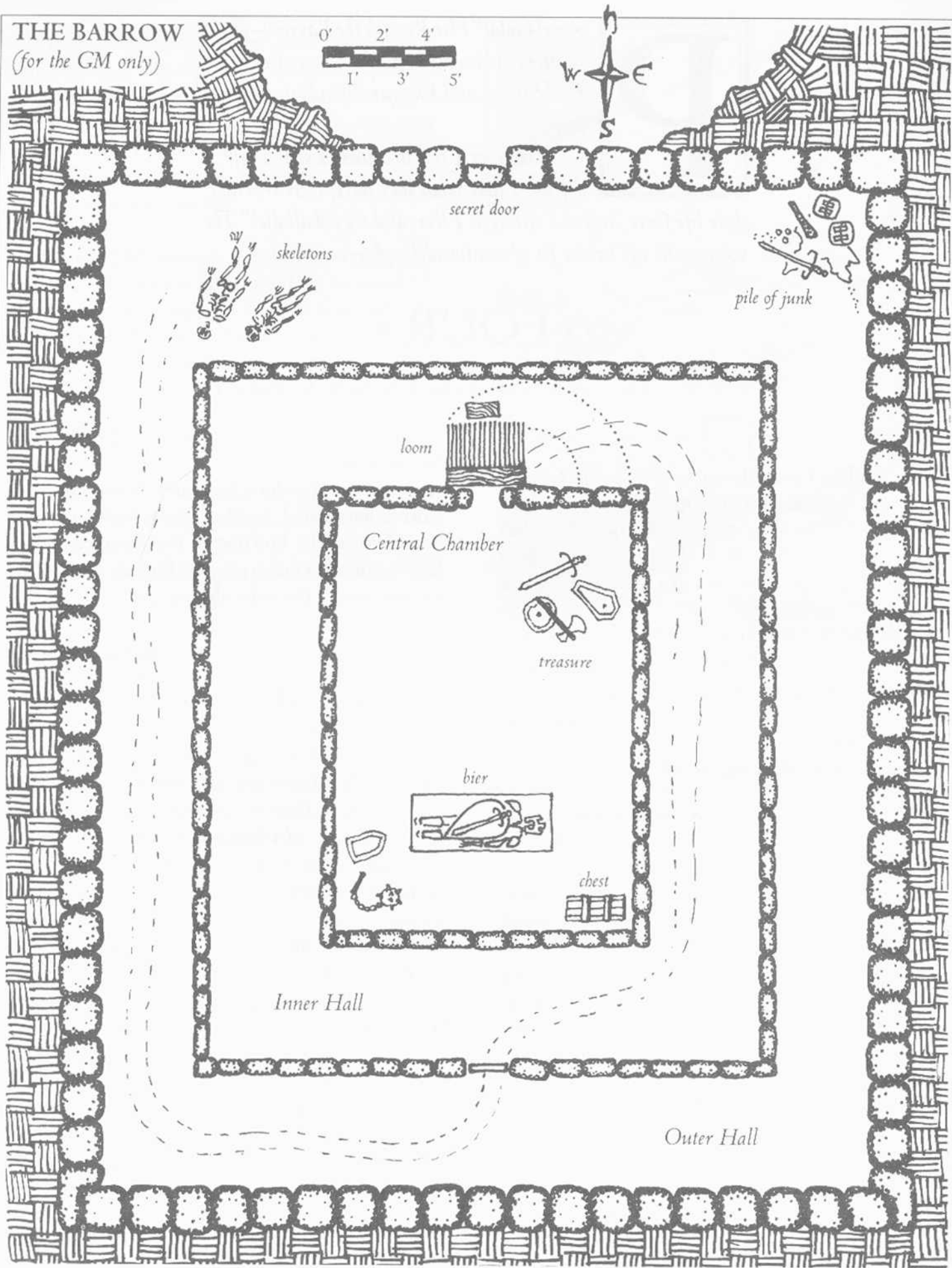
*Cold moans o'er the downs.
Wold was, long ago.
Old hold groaned with gold.
Scop moaned tales twice told.
Cold groans Wight in heart.
Grow, cold! Still their bones!
Bones hot, quick with flesh!
Hot blood galls in mine.
Seep out life! Warm this Wight!
Leave them cold in endless night!*

The voice continues to drone on, and you drift back into nothingness.

• Go to stage 2.

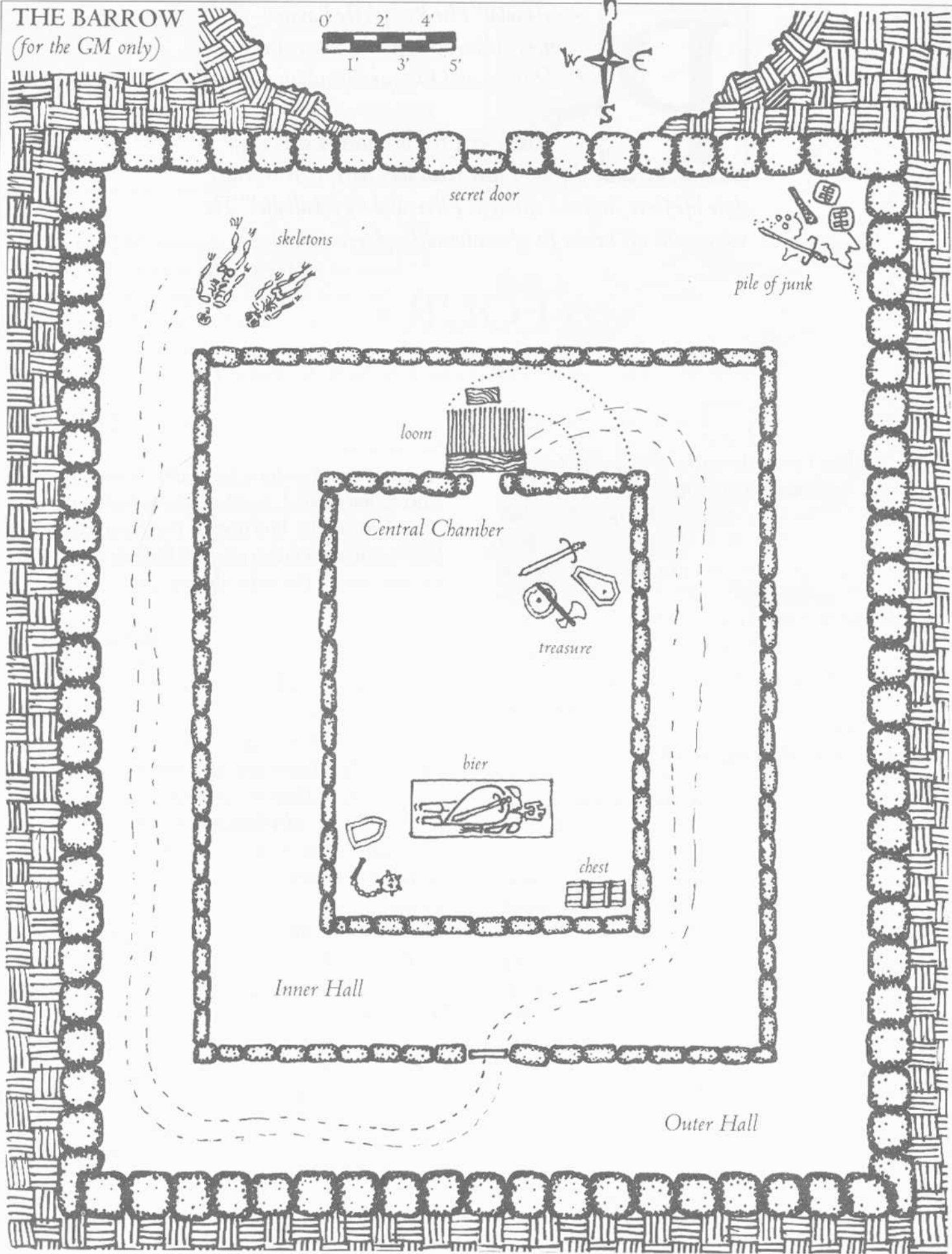
THE BARROW

(for the GM only)



THE BARROW

(for the GM only)



One character is about to be held captive. All remaining PCs will soon regain consciousness.

First, review the notes you took in the last scene — the results of the *Magical maneuver*. Choose the character who did most poorly for Dargar to drag off into the center of the barrow. This will give the PCs an incentive to search for him or her.

(If the numerical results yield an inappropriate choice, feel free to ignore them and pick someone else. An NPC might be the best choice, so that one player won't have to sit idle and wait to be rescued. If there are no NPCs in the party, a Ranger might be next best. You will want the people playing Scouts and Warriors to have the fun of playing where they are the experts: indoors and in battle.)

After you have chosen a character to be a captive, inform that player that their character remains unconscious but that other characters will be waking up.

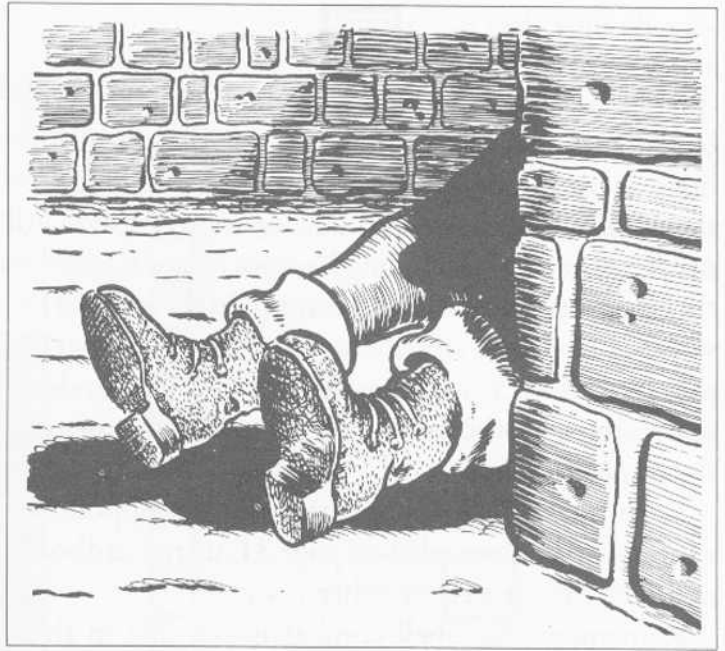
• *Now go to stage 3.*

Describe the scene as the PCs awaken.

Eyes still closed, you hear a soft noise. It sounds like a big sack of meal scraping across a stone floor, dragged by the miller. The hushing starts near you, and moves to the right.

After a minute, you can open your heavy eyelids. The long, narrow room has doorway openings at either end of the long wall opposite you. (See the floor plan on page 31 for more details.) A faint greenish glow shines from the walls and ceiling. By this sickly light you can see the hands of some of your companions. The weird color makes it hard to tell whether or not they are alive.

You also see the legs and feet of _____ (insert captive's name) disappearing around a corner. (Show the players the sketch showing generalized feet in leggings and boots disappearing down a passageway in the right of a wall, Dargar, who is dragging the body, is not visible.)



Now your arms and legs can move, but sitting up is still impossible. Your groping right hand finds your melee weapon, but no other equipment.

The dragging sound grows softer and softer. It stops. After a pause, you hear a screech like rusty hinges, then silence for several minutes.

Suddenly a skeleton appears around the corner. It stops, then seems to be looking straight at the group with its empty eye sockets. Within each socket a pinpoint of light kindles. Hot blood pumps through your body. Suddenly you can move.

The skeleton lifts its sword. It grinds its teeth, a flat, dry sound since it has no cheeks. It stalks slowly toward you. In your mind you hear the words "Dargar. I kill." Behind him, another form stirs and begins to move out of the darkness.

What do you do?

• *Go to stage 4.*

GM NOTE

The dragging sound was the removal of one member of the party. Dargar has dragged one of the characters to the inner sanctum of the tomb where Hir Rusark can begin to drain his or her life energy. This is the character you chose in stage two, above, to remain unconscious.

The PCs have 2 rounds in which to take action before Dargar attacks. They have their best hand-to-hand weapon (the one with the highest bonus) by their sides. They have on their clothes and armor. All other possessions including backpacks are stacked in the nearest corner, behind them and to the left. If a PC wants to find a specific item, warn him or her that the pile looks like a real mess. It will take 2 rounds to search through the jumble of waterskins, arrows etc. for a specific item.

Keep track of the characters' and their opponents' actions on the floor plan on page 31, using cardboard markers, miniatures, or other markers.

Remember that spell combat is possible in these two rounds but that none of the characters have missile weapons unless they had previously carefully concealed them.

Possible concealed weapons would include using a sling as a bracelet, hiding a dagger in a boot, or keeping something in an inside pocket of your clothing. Clothing does not often come with inside pockets, but a character who knows how to sew and has the supplies could have added one during their evening watch.

A PC who thinks to wake up the sleeping PCs should get 50 *experience points*. Note down the first person to mention it, to reward them later.

If PCs awaken their sleeping friends by shouting or touch, everyone may fight on the first round of combat. If no one mentions waking up sleeping PCs, the noise of battle will do so, and the sleepers may fight on the fourth round after Dargar's threat — that is, the second round of combat.

• *When everyone has used their two rounds of preparation, go to stage 5.*

GM NOTE

Skeletons are the Undead remains of evil Men or Dwarves, held to this world by their continued service to some evil master. Although they are nearly mindless, Skeletons have an eternal hatred of the living. Whenever encountering living creatures and not under direct orders from their master, Skeletons will attack immediately and fight to the death.

Another result of their mindlessness is that Skeletons can not be *Calmed* by magic. Skeletons do not suffer from "unconscious" results on the Combat Table, instead they take 10 points of damage from the blow and keep fighting. A kill result means that the skull of the Skeleton has been completely shattered and the monster then collapses into a heap of bones.

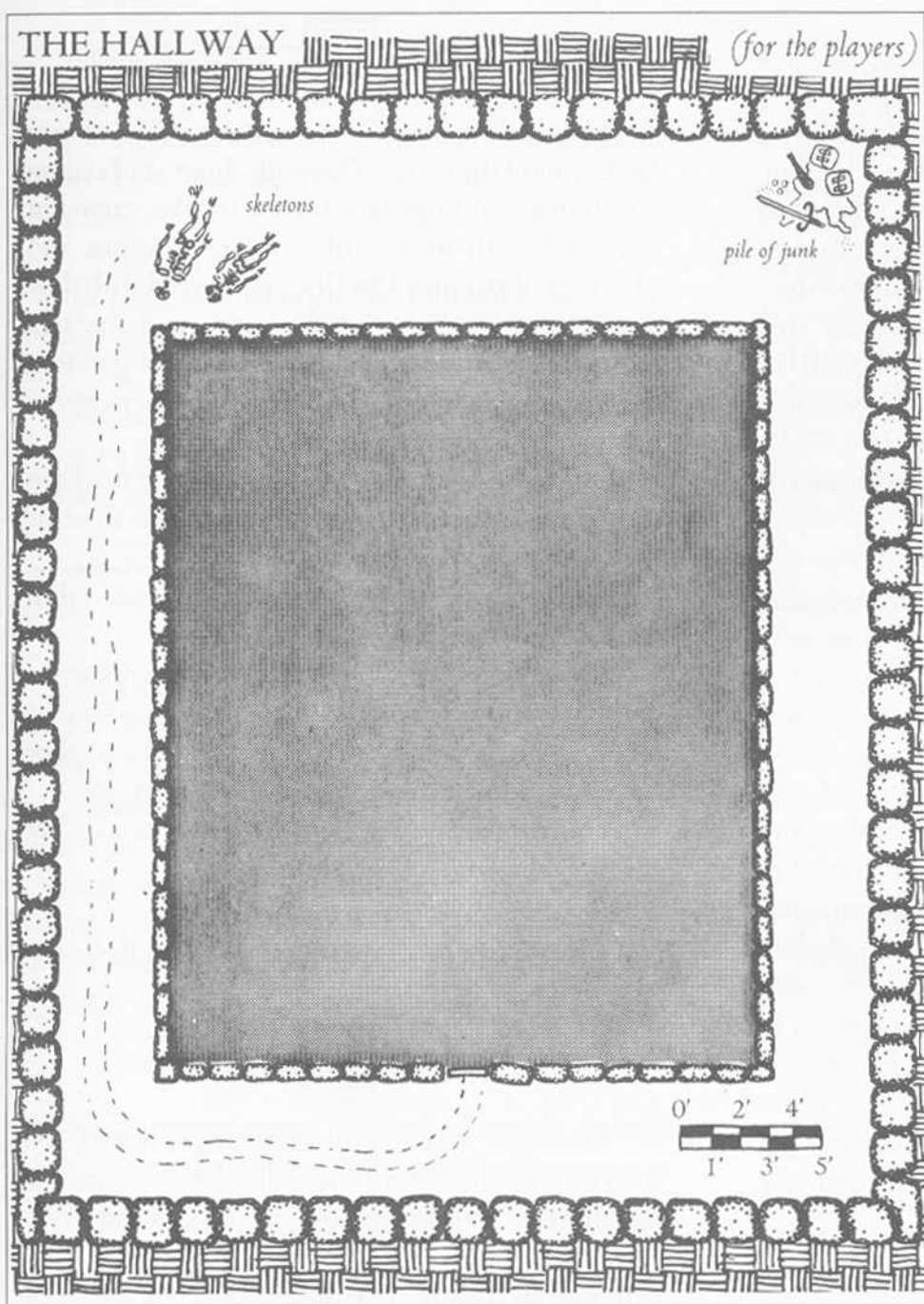
The Skeleton's hatred of living things is so great that it draws the life essence from creatures around it. For every combat round spent within five feet of a Skeleton, each character loses one point of *Endurance*. These losses heal at a rate of one point every four hours. However, a PC whose *Endurance* drops below 0 becomes a Skeleton under the control of the one who drained him or her.

Below are listed the full combat statistics of Dargar and Scop for use in this battle.

<i>Dargar</i>	
Strength	3
Agility	2
Intelligence	0
Movement	2
Defense	4
Melee OB	4
Missile OB	3
General	-1
Subterfuge	-2
Perception	0
Magical	-3
Endurance	100
<i>Scop</i>	
Strength	2
Agility	1
Intelligence	0
Movement	2
Defense	3
Melee OB	3
Missile OB	2
General	-1
Subterfuge	-2
Perception	0
Magical	-3
Endurance	80

Dargar wears a jerkin of boiled leather and a rusted iron helm. As he strides towards battle, he swings a well-honed broad sword. Standing a full 7'4", Dargar has a long reach. He was also an excellent swordsman.

Scop, once Hir Rusark's minstrel, is not as large or as fearsome as Dargar. Wearing robes of tattered blue velvet, he bears only a mace with which to attack.



5

For the combat with Dargar and Scop, use the *action sequence COMBAT* on page 25 of *The Guidelines*.

The party is being attacked by two skeletons, the Undead remains of Hir Rusark's most trusted assistants, Dargar and Scop. The party has plenty of time to arrange themselves for combat unless they start digging through the pile of equipment and junk in the corner.

Remember that only four characters will be able to fit around a single skeleton. Skeletons are nearly mindless, carrying only hate for all living things, so they will attack until destroyed. The boxed passage below contains information about Dargar and Scop as well as general information about skeletons.

- After the combat, if all of the characters are unconscious or killed, go to stage 24 on page 42.
- Otherwise, go to stage 6.

6

If one or more PCs are wounded, the group may choose to rest long enough to heal or use healing herbs. If a PC sorts through the belongings in the corner, he or she will find the pectoral detailed on page 43 in the treasure list (superscript number ⁷). Wearing the item doubles the PC's healing rate.

If a character suggests searching Dargar, allow him or her to find a key hooked to the ribs under the leather jerkin, and to earn 50 EPs.

You may also need to remind the players that one member of the party is still missing.

If the players do not think of it, ask if their PCs want to search the passageways. Show them the map on this page and allow them to see that they are searching in a rectangle. They find only a heavy wooden door, bound with iron, with a big hasp and lock.

Allow each of the characters to make a *Perception maneuver* as they examine this chamber. Go to the stage indicated by the highest roll obtained in the party to describe what they discover about their surroundings.

- If the party rolls 8 or less, go to stage 7.
- If the party rolls from 9 to 11, go to stage 8.
- If the party rolls from 12 to 14, go to stage 9.
- If the party rolls 15 or more, go to stage 10.

The battle over and the skeletons defeated, you look around the room. The walls, floor, and ceiling are all made of huge faced stone blocks, carved in bas relief with images of royal processions and offerings of tribute. The floor is covered with dust except for the center of the room and the area immediately around the door. The pile of goods in the corner appears to be a mixed jumble of personal belongings from various travellers.

You can see no way out of this room except through the large oaken door.

- *The contents of the equipment pile are detailed at the beginning of stage 11, go there now.*

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On closer examination, you note scuff marks in the dust leading up to the oak door. This must be the way that skeleton dragged _____ (fill in the name of the character who was taken prisoner in stage 3.)

You can see no way out of this room except through the large oaken door.

- *The contents of the equipment pile are detailed at the beginning of stage 11, go there now.*

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On closer examination you note scuff marks in the dust leading up to the oak door. This must be the way that skeleton dragged _____ (fill in the name of the character who was taken prisoner in stage 3.)

The eerie green glow in the hall seems to be coming from some sort of fungus that grows on the stone. If you scrape some off, it continues to glow for about fifteen minutes and then fades out.

You can see no way out of this room except through the large oaken door.

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On closer examination, you note scuff marks in the dust leading up to the oak door. This must be the way that skeleton dragged _____ (fill in the name of the character who was taken prisoner in stage 3.)

The eerie green glow in the hall seems to be coming from some sort of fungus that grows on the stone. If you scrape some off, it continues to glow for about fifteen minutes and then fades out.

There are a few areas of the stone where the fungus does not seem to grow as quickly. Looking closer, this area is about the size and shape of a large door. This may be the secret entrance to the barrow.

If the party tries to open the door have them make a *Strength* maneuver, then read the following description.

Try as you might, you can not get the blocks to move or find any lock or mechanism to open the portal. Even if you could open this passage, _____ (fill in the name of the character captured in stage 3) still lies beyond the oaken door.

The door to the barrow cannot be opened without the use of magic except by hacking through the stones. The magic required is in the form of a specific set of chants and gestures that the party has never had access to. The crypt fungus is slowly killed if exposed to sunlight so it grows less thickly on the inside of the barrow's door.

• *The contents of the equipment pile are detailed at the beginning of stage 11, go there now.*

II

If the characters spend half an hour going through the pile of equipment and other junk in the corner of this entrance hall, you may read them the following list of the items they find.

As you poke through this jumbled heap of equipment and rags, you find all of the equipment you were carrying. (If the characters had a pony, mule, or horses, any equipment on the animals is not found here.) In addition you find:

- Eight cloaks, two sized for a Dwarf or Hobbit.
- Three empty backpacks.
- Seven large sacks.
- Six pouches.
- Two bedrolls.
- Three coils of rope.

- A ball of twine.
- Two small knives.
- One mace.
- A rusted crossbow.
- A short sword.
- One Hobbit-sized bow with eight arrows.
- Two long bows with twenty-four arrows.
- Three tinder boxes.
- Ten small flints.
- One suit of boiled leather armor, sized for a large man.
- One suit of chain armor, sized for a Dwarf.
- A yard of tattered but usable red velvet.
- A wooden pipe and a leather pouch of pipe-weed, in fact, some of the famed Long-bottom Leaf of the South Farthing.
- A letter of introduction from Elrond to Círdan the Shipwright, mentioning the smithing skills of a young Elf and dated 112 years ago.
- A set of two inch long teeth, possibly those of a bear, drilled and strung on a leather thong.
- A bronze pectoral, more fully described in the treasures of the barrow section on page 43.
- A braided lock of raven black hair wrapped in a tracery of fine silver wire.
- A set of woodcarving tools.
- A partially worked and poorly proportioned carving of an Oliphaunt.
- A clay seal bearing the sign of three apples.

Various herbs and foodstuffs, all rotted long past usefulness, are also present. Strangely there is no coinage and very little that would be considered treasure of any kind in the pile.

Hir Rusark has been waylaying travellers for a long time and has amassed a bewildering variety of things from the far corners of Middle-earth. He has instructed Dargar to strip their guests, piling normal equipment here and bringing treasure into his inner sanctum.

• *Go to stage 12.*

12

At this point the party should be ready to go in search of their lost companion deeper inside the crypt. To do this they will have to get past the oak door.

The oak door in front of you appears very sturdy, bound in iron and sealed with a large hasp and lock. How do you propose to get past it?

There are several ways to get past the door. By far the easiest is to use the key attached to Dargar's ribs. This will also prevent the functioning of the trap contained in the lock. The only difficulty is that the characters must have been clever enough to search under Dargar's armor in order to find the key.

The trap is a poisoned needle that springs out of the lock if it is tampered with in any way. The needle attacks with a *Missile OB* of 3, and the poison results in a -2 to all skills for three hours due to pain and swelling at the joints. Finding the trap without setting it off is a *Subterfuge*Δ9 maneuver, while disarming it safely is a *Subterfuge*Δ8 maneuver. The trap only holds one needle, so only one character will be attacked before the trap ceases to work.

Picking the lock is a *Subterfuge*Δ10 maneuver and will set off the trap, if it has not been sprung or disarmed. This occurs regardless of whether the lock is successfully opened or not. The lock can be removed with a hacksaw without triggering the needle, but this will require about fifteen minutes of steady work. The lock can also be broken with a mace or sledge hammer. This is a *Strength*Δ8 maneuver, but if the unmodified roll is a two, the tool will break and the lock will hold. Knocking down the door is a *Strength*Δ18 maneuver, but two characters can try at the same time, each *rolling the dice* and combining their rolls.

The door is very old, hard, dense wood, so it will not burn easily. A large amount of tinder and flammables such as oil will get it to light, but this fire must be maintained for about twenty minutes before the door is weakened enough to fall. The characters will all fall unconscious due to smoke inhalation in about eight minutes, so this is not a good idea. If the characters insist on trying this anyway, skip to stage 24. (Gandalf wakes the party.)

Fire Bolt spells will merely singe the door and char the top eighth inch of wood. As the door is a full foot thick, this will not be an effective strategy.

The hinges are on the other side of the door, so they can not be removed without having already opened the door.

Eventually the characters should find some way of getting past the door and into the inner hall. Remember that they only get *experience points* for successful maneuvers, no matter how many things they try.

• *When the door has been opened, go to stage 13.*

13

Now you may describe the area beyond the oak door.

As you peer through the doorway you see another hallway, lit by the same green light as the entrance hall.

Only fifteen feet wide, the hall runs to the left and right. Across from you is a stone wall. (Show the players the map on page 36.)

If you quickly search this hall, you find that it leads around back to where you started. In essence it is a large rectangle with the center filled in. There is no sign of _____ (fill in the name of the character captured in stage 3.) and no place to have hidden the body.

Decorated as a regal hallway from several hundred years in the past, rotting tapestries hang on the walls, their designs long since faded into oblivion. Large pottery urns standing in the corners are decorated with scenes of feasting and battle. The floor is a mosaic in muted colors depicting an endless procession of military figures marching around the rectangular hallway. The ceiling, twelve feet overhead, is plain and unadorned. Iron torch holders are mounted on the walls between the tapestries, their light now the eerie green of the crypt fungus.

The only anomaly is a huge loom at which a skeletal figure with long flowing hair sits as if weaving.

The loom is actually a doorway leading into the inner sanctum of Hir Rusark. The entire assemblage is wired together, even the skeletal form of Renora. However this is so subtly done that the characters will not notice it without making a *Perception* $\Delta 13$ maneuver.

If the players state that they are examining the loom more closely, have them each make a *Perception* maneuver. The highest roll of any character, including skill modifiers, will determine how much information they gain.

- If the best maneuver in the party is 8 or less, go to stage 14.
- If the best maneuver in the party is 9 or 10, go to stage 15.
- If the best maneuver in the party is 11 or 12, go to stage 16.
- If the best maneuver in the party is 13 or 14, go to stage 17.
- If the best maneuver in the party is 15 or more, go to stage 18.

EXAMPLE

Here is an example of two characters working together to use their combined strength to push down the door.

If Gláin and Gallind try to knock down the door, both roll the dice. Gláin obtains a roll of 9 plus his bonus of 2, and Gallind rolls a 7 plus his *Strength* bonus of -1. Adding these together, we get a total of 17, not quite enough to open the door. However the characters can wait five minutes and try again.

14

The skeleton does not move, and you notice that she is completely inanimate. Apparently she has sat here as long as the tomb has lain hidden, the dry air mummifying her remains.

If you look more closely at the loom, you see that it is large enough to have woven the tapestries in the hall. Indeed, the tattered remains of a partial tapestry molder under the skeletal hands. In the right hand is clutched a large bronze shuttle.

Examining the loom further, you accidentally shake it and then notice that it all seems to move slightly. Shaking some more reveals that the entire structure, including the skeleton and bench move together as one unit.

The weight of the foot-long, fifteen-pound golden shuttle holds down the entire apparatus. If the shuttle is lifted, the entire loom swings away from the wall revealing a doorway into Hir Rusark's inner sanctum. The entire artifice is carefully counterbalanced and will not move away from the wall with less than two characters pushing while the shuttle is in place. (Moving the loom without removing the shuttle is a *Strength* $\Delta 18$ maneuver.)

- Go to stage 19.

15

The skeleton does not move, and you notice that she is completely inanimate. Apparently she has sat here as long as the tomb has lain hidden, the dry air mummifying her remains.

If you look more closely at the loom, you see that it is large enough to have woven the tapestries in the hall. Indeed, the tattered remains of a partial tapestry molder under the skeletal hands. In the right hand is clutched a large bronze-colored shuttle.

Examining the loom further, you accidentally shake it and then notice that it all seems to move slightly. Shaking some more reveals that the entire structure, including the skeleton and bench move together as one unit.

Notice the thick dust around the base of the loom. There appear to be scrapes and scuff marks leading up to it and then stopping. Following the marks in the other direction they go back to the oak door. But why do they stop at the loom, and where is _____ (insert name of missing character) if he/she was dragged to the loom?

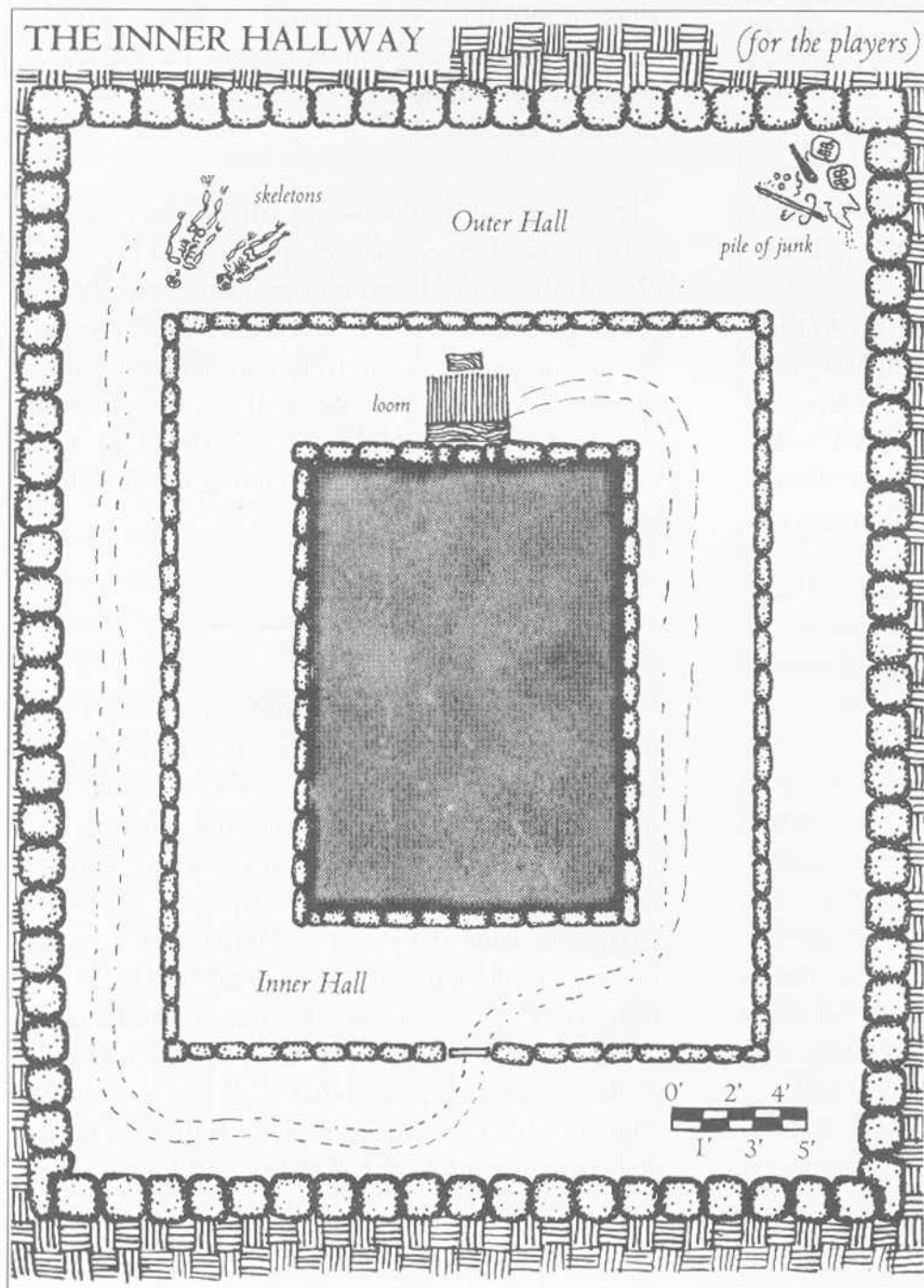
The weight of the foot-long, fifteen-pound golden shuttle holds down the entire apparatus. If the shuttle is lifted the entire loom swings away from the wall revealing a doorway into Hir Rusark's inner sanctum.

The entire artifice is carefully counterbalanced and will not move away from the wall with less than two characters pushing while the shuttle is in place. (Moving the loom without removing the shuttle is a *Strength Δ18* maneuver.)

The scrapes down the hallway are indeed the marks left when Dargar dragged his captive into the inner sanctum. The marks actually continue on under the loom.

• Go to stage 19.

16



The skeleton does not move, and you notice that she is completely inanimate. Apparently she has sat here as long as the tomb has lain hidden, the dry air mummifying her remains.

If you look more closely at the loom, you see that it is large enough to have woven the tapestries in the hall. Indeed, the tattered remains of a partial tapestry molder under the skeletal hands. In the right hand is clutched a large bronze-colored shuttle.

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Notice the thick dust around the base of the loom. There appear to be scrapes and scuff marks leading up to it and then stopping. Following the marks in the other direction they go back to the oak door. But why do they stop at the loom and where is _____ (insert name of missing character) if he/she was dragged to the loom?

Following the dust trail where it appears to go under the loom

you get another surprise. The loom does not rest on the floor, but is actually raised a full quarter inch above the mosaic. It does not seem to be raised on runners or wheels. In fact you can see nothing to keep it from falling the quarter inch to the floor!

The weight of the foot-long, fifteen-pound golden shuttle holds down the entire apparatus. If the shuttle is lifted the entire loom swings away from the wall revealing a doorway into Hir Rusark's inner sanctum. The entire artifice is carefully counterbalanced and will not move away from the wall with less than two characters pushing while the shuttle is in place.

(Moving the loom without removing the shuttle is a *StrengthΔ18* maneuver.)

The scrapes down the hallway are indeed the marks left when Dargar dragged his captive into the inner sanctum. The marks actually continue on under the loom.

The loom is raised so that it does not scrape on the floor when the door is opened. It is supported by its attachments to the wall rather than by resting on the floor.

• Go to stage 19.



Startled at first by the figure and reminded of the skeletons you so recently fought, you start to draw your weapons. However the figure does not move and you notice that she is completely inanimate, but has sat here as long as the tomb has lain hidden, the dry air mummifying her remains.

If you look more closely at the loom, you see that it is large enough to have woven the tapestries in the hall. Indeed the tattered remains of a partial tapestry molder under the skeletal hands. In the right hand is clutched a large bronze-colored shuttle.

Examining the loom further, you accidentally shake it and then notice that it all seems to move slightly. Shaking some more reveals that the entire structure, including the skeleton and bench move together as one unit.

Notice the thick dust around the base of the loom. There appear to be scrapes and scuff marks leading up to it and then stopping. Following the marks in the other direction they go back to the oak door. But why do they stop at the loom and where is _____ (insert name of missing character) if he/she was dragged to the loom?

Following the dust trail where it appears to go under the loom you get another surprise. The loom does not rest on the floor, but is actually raised a full quarter inch above the mosaic. It does not seem to be raised on runners or wheels. In fact you can see nothing to keep it from falling the quarter inch to the floor.

Along the right side of loom along the stone wall are three brass cylinders each a half inch in diameter and four inches long. You can see no reason for the cylinders, nor any means of attaching them to the loom or the wall. Strange, but they look for all the world like oversized hinge elbows. What could they be doing attached to the back of the loom?

The weight of the foot-long, fifteen-pound golden shuttle holds down the entire apparatus. If the shuttle is lifted the entire loom swings away from the wall revealing a doorway into Hir Rusark's inner sanctum. The entire artifice is carefully counterbalanced and will not move away from the wall with less than two characters pushing while the shuttle is in place. (Moving the loom without removing the shuttle is a *StrengthΔ18* maneuver.)

The scrapes down the hallway are indeed the marks left when Dargar dragged his captive into the inner sanctum. The marks actually continue on under the loom.

The loom is raised so that it does not scrape on the floor when the door is opened. It is supported by its attachments to the wall rather than by resting on the floor.

The metal cylinders are indeed hinges and allow the whole unit to swing open as well as holding the weight of the contraption up off the floor.

• Go to stage 19

The skeleton does not move, and you notice that she is completely inanimate. Apparently she has sat here as long as the tomb has lain hidden, the dry air mummifying her remains.

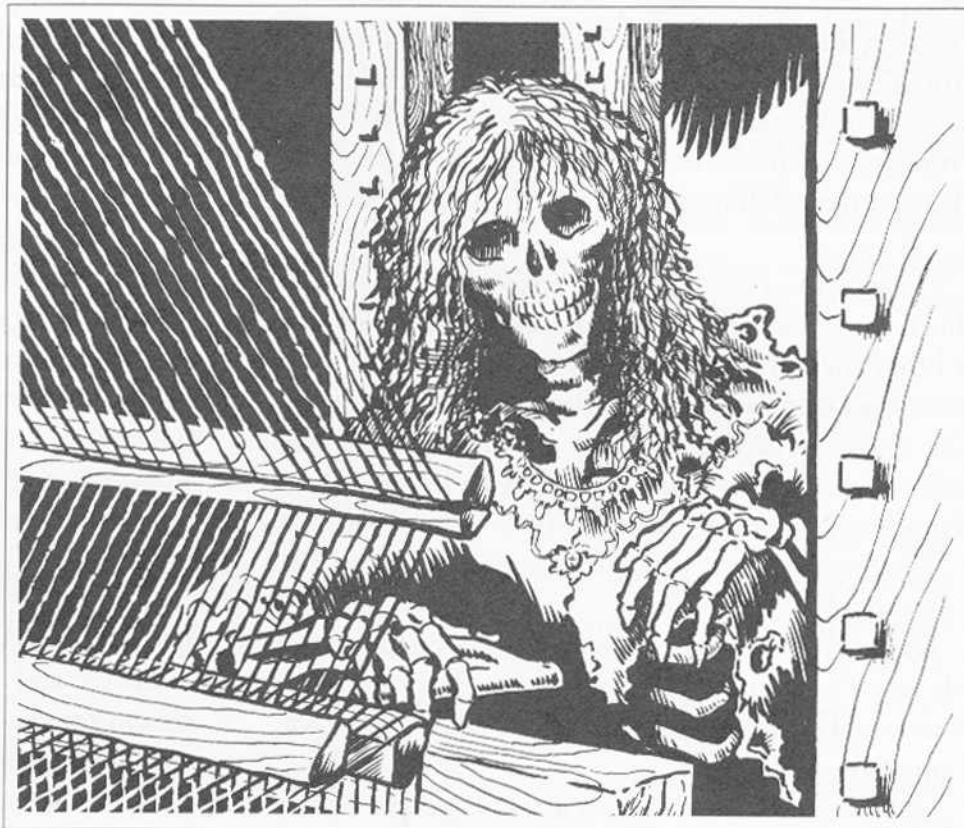
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Notice the thick dust around the base of the loom. There appear to be scrapes and scuff marks leading up to it and then stopping. Following the marks in the other direction they go back to the oak door. But why do they stop at the loom and where is _____ (insert name of missing character) if he/she was dragged to the loom?

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Along the right side of loom along the stone wall are three brass cylinders each a half inch in diameter and four inches long. You can see no reason for the cylinders, nor any means of attaching them to the loom or the wall. Strange, but they look for all the world like oversized hinge elbows. What could they be doing attached to the back of the loom?



Heavy tarred linen cord runs up the left side of the loom against the wall and then across its to pat the back. The cord seems to be both thick and strong and runs through small brass guides. When the cord reaches the top right corner of the loom it disappears into a small hole in the wall. Try as you might you can't make any connection between the linen cord and the strands of the tapestry. There is something very strange about this whole thing.

The weight of the foot-long, fifteen-pound golden shuttle holds down the entire apparatus. If the shuttle is lifted the entire loom swings away from the wall revealing a doorway into Hir Rusark's inner sanctum. The entire artifice is carefully counterbalanced and will not move away from the wall with less than two characters pushing while the shuttle is in place. (Moving the loom without removing the shuttle is a *Strength Δ18* maneuver.)

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The metal cylinders are indeed hinges and allow the whole unit to swing open as well as holding the weight of the contraption up off the floor.

The linen cord connects the loom to heavy lead counterweights in the wall. When the secret door is opened the counterweights can be heard as a muffled clanking sound coming from inside the stone wall.

• Go to stage 19.

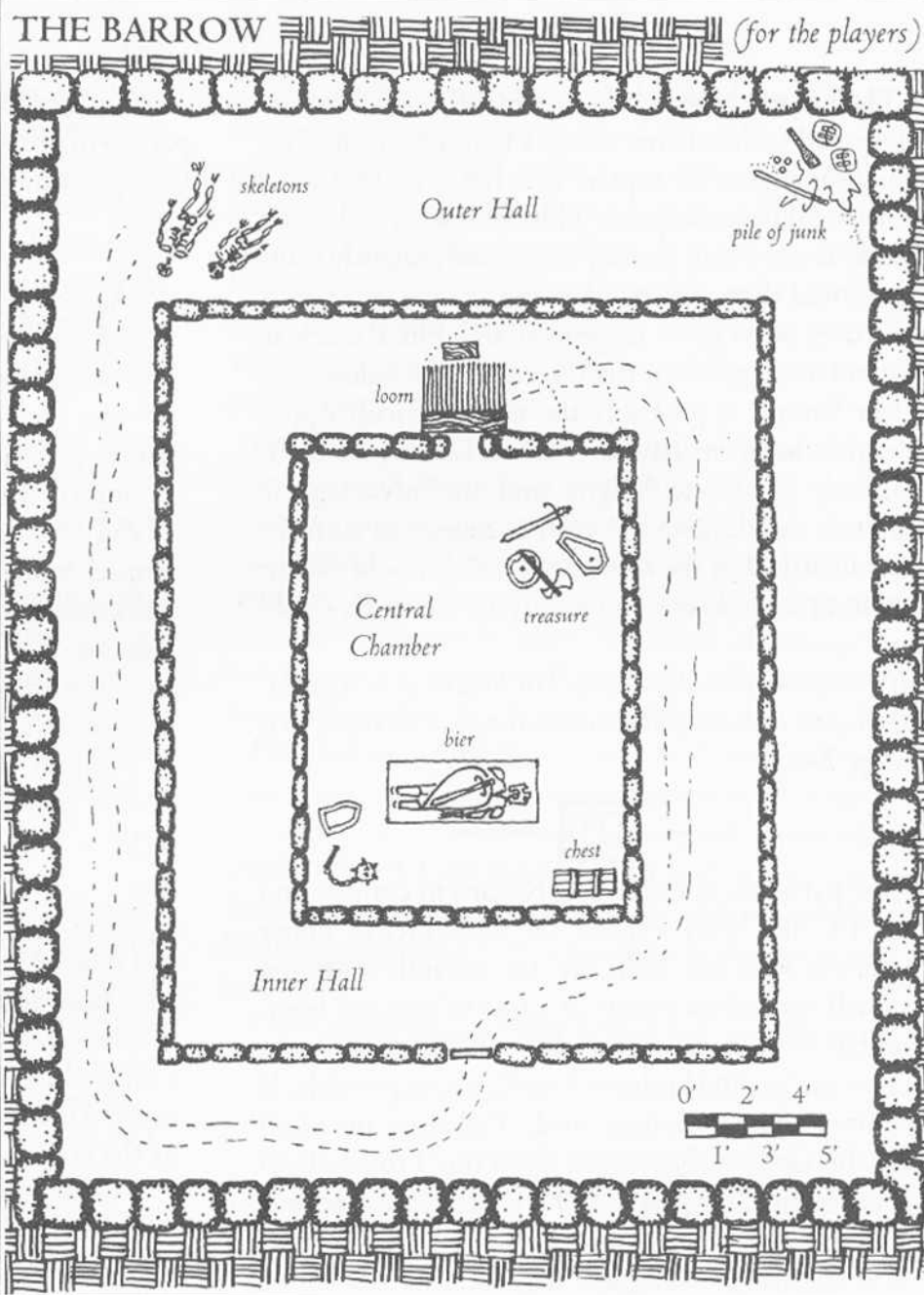
19

At this point the party should know or guess that the loom hides a secret door. The door can be opened by pulling the loom aside or by lifting the golden shuttle. When either of these happens, read the players the following description.

As the loom swings aside, you see a small opening in the stone wall. Only 4' wide and 5 1/2' tall, this hole leads to the inner chamber of the tomb.

Peering through green light into the room you notice a raised platform. On it something begins to move. As you watch in horror, you see a ghostly form merging into a suit of plate mail that lies on a purple-draped bier. Clanking and grinding, the armor rises to a sitting position. Above the neck opening is a helm circled with a crown. Dimly seen within is a shadowy skull.

Grinning terribly, the Wight swings its legs over the side of the bier, steps down, and takes a stance, feet spread apart. It holds a sword and shield in its mailed fists.



It speaks, the words hissing from its ghastly face. Inside the gaping teeth you see a thin white tongue twitching. Its words do not match its jaw movements.

Its words start slowly, then speed up. "Looooong haaave I waaited for you," it says.

To your right, you hear a familiar voice. "Help! Help!" If you glance over at the sound, you see _____ (the hostage) slowly getting up.

• Go to stage 20.

The players have finally met Hir Rusark, Barrow-wight and Lord of this tomb. He has been drawing the life energy of his captive who has lost 10% of his or her total *Endurance points*. This has made Hir Rusark visible as a shifting ghostly shape, only slightly more substantial than a November fog.

Details of Wights in general and Hir Rusark in particular are given in the boxed section below.

Hir Rusark is probably the most difficult opponent the characters have ever faced. Luckily a barrow will only hold one Wight, and the advantage in numbers should give the party a chance to turn the tide of battle. For the combat, the GM should use the COMBAT action sequence found on page 25 of *The Guidelines*.

- If the characters are able to defeat Hir Rusark, go to stage 21.
- If all of the characters fall before the strength of the Wight, go to stage 24.

The party has defeated Hir Rusark in combat and each PC has truly earned the title Hero. Those characters who lost skills feel the warmth returning and will regain lost points at a rate of one per hour. Combat wounds are more difficult. Encourage the PCs to use healing herbs and spells where possible. If only two characters have died, Tatharína may still have the Golden Queensfan from the Troll-hole in the adventure "DAWN COMES EARLY." Otherwise, the PCs should be mourning the loss of their friends.

- If all of the party is alive, go to stage 22.
- Otherwise, go to stage 23

After Tatharína has done what healing she can, the party will probably examine the room. While they are looking around, you can read the following description.

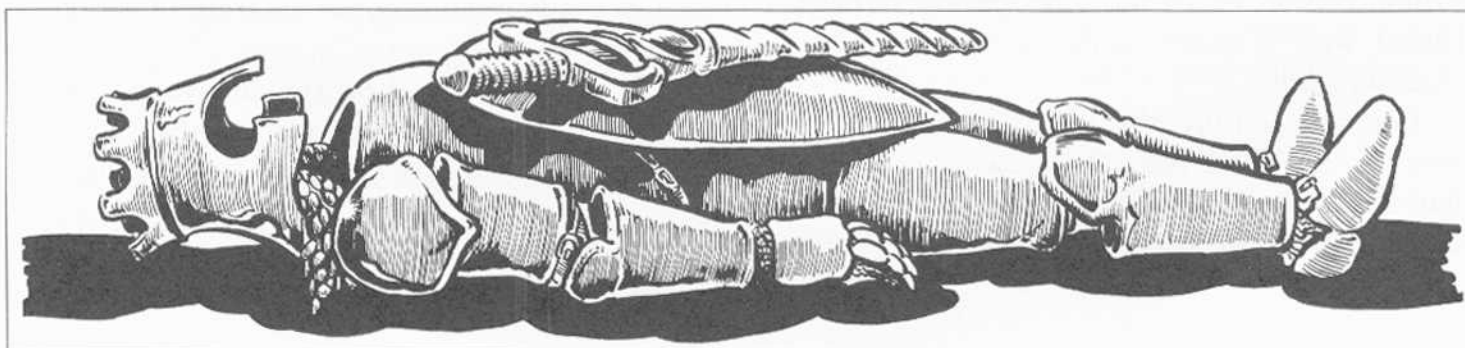
As you look around, you are struck by the wealth and beauty of a Prince's grave. The marble bier dominates the center of the rectangular room, its sides carved to resemble vines and flowers. The flower petals are all inlaid in stone and gems. The floor is tiled in abstract patterns of alabaster and jet. Above, the vaulted ceiling seems to be of intertwined branches in imitation of Elven styles in Mirkwood. The walls are hung with the rotting remains of tapestries and paintings. Only the gold and silver threads woven into some of the tapestries attest to their original brightness and glory.

Around the walls are chests carved of rare woods, fine pottery urns, piles of rotting furs, and racks of ancient weapons, many long since gone to rust.

As you start to search through the wealth piled and heaped around the room, you notice that you have been joined by another person. Standing in the doorway, leaning on a staff, is an old man with a long white beard and very bushy eyebrows. He is dressed in a dark cloak and a pointed hat. The end of the staff begins to glow. The light is blue.

"Greetings, travellers, and well met," announces the visitor. "First you chase after Trolls and now I find you in the halls of a Barrow-wight. And what brings you to this chill hole?" Of course, it is Gandalf who helped you after your fight with the two Trolls under the bridge north of Bree.

- Go to stage 25.



GM NOTE

Wights normally appear as dark, shadowy forms with eyes akin to faint lights. They inhabit the same world as the dreaded Nazgûl, or Ringwraiths, and are hard to perceive as anything other than dark misty shapes. If allowed to feed on the Essence of the living, they become more substantial for a time. If seen with the aid of special magic, Wights will take the tattered appearance of great Lords of Men with cold cruel eyes.

Animated through their own evil and the cruel magics of Sauron, Wights bear a hatred of all life. They exist solely to hoard their treasures and kill everything they come in contact with.

Wights are extremely hard to destroy and take only half damage from non-magic weapons. Contact with a Wight or its weapon causes a painful cold to settle over the heart and body of the victim. This cold drains one point from each of the characters skills. The loss is permanent until the Wight is destroyed. Then the loss returns at a rate of one skill point per hour.

The presence of a Wight also causes great fear in anyone within ten feet. Each character within 10' of a Wight must roll a *Magical* Δ7 *maneuver* or be rooted to the spot in terror. This fear is checked every combat round before any combat or movement takes place. Once a character succeeds in this *maneuver* roll he or she is immune to the fear aura of that Wight for the rest of the combat. Barrow-wights also drain the life essence of creatures around them as do skeletons. This results in a loss of 4 points of *Endurance* every round a character is within 10' of the Wight.

Wights have a few special powers that add to their ability to attract prey. First of all, any intelligent creature within one half mile of the Wight's barrow will be drawn toward the tomb. This attraction can be resisted if noticed, by a successful *Magical* Δ12 *maneuver*, unless the creature actually gets within twenty feet of the barrow. Then only

special magics or the death of the Wight will free the creature of this compulsion. Secondly, unsuspecting creatures will suffer from exhaustion or a sense of tiredness while they are within 20' of the barrow. This exhaustion will result in a deep sleep lasting four hours. This exhaustion only works once on a given creature when used by a given Wight, although another Wight could later put the same creature to sleep.

As Wights were once great Lords of Men, they often possess magical armor and weapons with which to attack their opponents. Being dead, they are immune to *Calm* spells and an unconscious result on the combat table merely does 12 points of damage. A kill result causes 16 points of damage, but does not destroy the Wight unless the weapon was enchanted with a bonus of at least +3.

Hir Rusark wears plate armor of finest quality, inlaid with gold and enamelled in baroque flourishes. His blade, Deathreaver, is a magic long sword which adds +1 to his *Melee OB* and +3 to the damage of each successful blow. In addition, while Deathreaver is held, none of the bearer's bones may be broken.

Hir Rusark's full combat statistics are as follows:

Strength	2	Missile OB	3
Agility	3	General	2
Intelligence	3	Subterfuge	2
Movement	2	Perception	3
Defense	4	Magical	2
Melee OB	5	Endurance	125

Hir Rusark does not carry a missile weapon and currently knows no magic, so he will fight with his sword.

Even destroying his physical form is not enough to permanently kill a Wight. After it has been killed the grave must be opened and the contents must be spread out for all to take so that the treasure is scattered. Otherwise, the grave will be re-inhabited by another Wight.

Tatharina has done all she can, but _____ (fill in the names of any characters who are still dead) is/are dead. The sense of loss and grief is so great that none of you even notice the old man who has joined you.

Then he speaks. "A Wight is a fearsome opponent. You have done well to have suffered so little loss. Golden Queensfan is rare, but perhaps I have something else in my pack that might help." The visitor lays down his staff and starts to rummage through his pack. Under his travel stained grey cloak you see his bushy eyebrows and flowing white beard. It is Gandalf the wandering wizard, a welcome friend in this cold place.

Gandalf will be able to bring the dead characters back to life and heal the wounded.

- When the party is able to move around again, go to stage 25.

You awaken slowly, as though you had been very deep in sleep. You seem unable to move.

You become aware that you are back in the hallway where you awoke what seems a long time ago. Is this just a recurring nightmare? No, this time you see a tall figure, his back turned to you, a pointed hat on his head. He is holding a staff. The end of the staff glows a bright blue, drowning out the green of the crypt-fungus. On your far right is a pile of bones and another one of treasure.

The mysterious figure is ending a loud chant. You have already forgotten the first words, which you could not understand, but the last phrases still echo in your memory:

*Begone, you cold Wight!
Leave now these lands of light!
Sea and star, earth and wind,
Be your unlfe at an end!*

His arms move as he gestures, and he mutters under his breath.



As the looming figure turns toward you, he shrinks to become an ordinary old man. Ordinary, that is, except for the staff which still glows blue, and piercing eyes under very bushy eyebrows. Of course, it is Gandalf the wandering wizard.

"Well, my friends, you have had a narrow escape. It is well that my friend reported that a group of brave folk were caught in these lands at night. I trust you will know better next time than to take shelter in the porch of a Barrow-wight! Though I admit that this crypt was outside of their usual area."

Gandalf will be able to bring any dead characters back to life (using some Queensfan from his pack) and to heal the wounded. When all the PCs are healthy again, it's time to think about treasure!

• Go to stage 25.

25

The Wizard sets the ball rolling.

"Best that the hoard be scattered," says Gandalf, "That the power be shattered and the Wight never return. Each of you may choose one piece for your own, as token of this day and reminder of your valor.

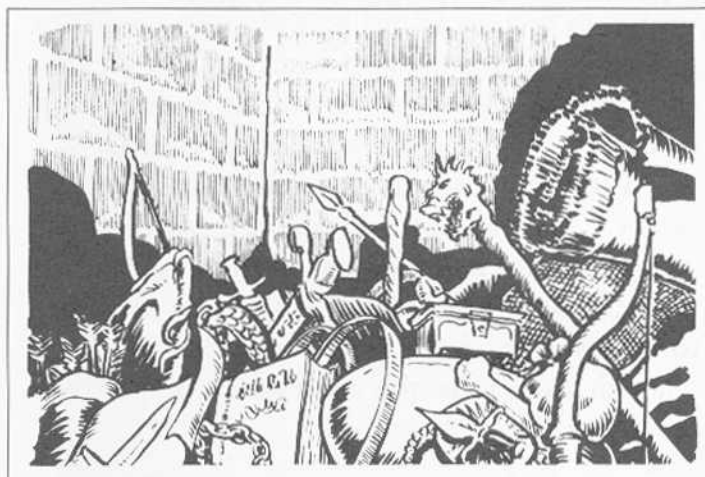
"I think it best that none chose this crown that has lain so long on so chill a brow." Gandalf pauses a moment, pulling at his nose in deep thought. "His plate mail as well should lie in the sun for at least a season before any wear it. And indeed, it would not fit any of you, being too tall and broad by half! Other of the weapons are too large as well. But here are many items of beauty, and some that may serve you well, if you wish to pursue the renegades plaguing the East Road."

The list below includes all the items that Gandalf deems safe for use. Magic items are marked by superscript number¹. Allow each player to choose an item without indicating whether or not the item is magical. Tatharina may use *Item Analysis* spell on some of the items, but the *Damage Taken* with each spell will keep her from checking every item.

Read aloud the list of treasure.

- Leaf-blade dagger¹ with black iron hilt.
- Short sword with scrolling copper inlay and copper-trimmed scabbard.
- Long sword², Mannish, with three runes on the blade.
- Elven bow of yew, with 10 arrows.
- Yew bow³, Hobbit-size, with 12 arrows and quiver.
- Oaken cudgel⁴, three feet long.
- Obsidian spear with yew shaft, 3 feet long.
- Dwarven hammer, with the hammer faces carved as scowling bearded faces.
- Round shield, bronze covered, 18 inches across.
- Bronze greaves, Dwarf-sized.
- Scarab pin⁵, carved of carnelian.
- Eagle's eye pin, in tiger's eye and onyx.
- Pin⁶ shaped as a golden hummingbird with ruby eyes.
- Round bronze pectoral⁷, suspended from a neck chain, 11 inches across, embossed with a design of sun's rays.
- Silver diadem⁸ set with moonstones.
- Gold circlet⁹ in the shape of a twisted branch.
- Gold ring, plain.
- Black reptile-skin belt¹⁰, Mannish.
- Scroll case, white bone.
- Leather belt pouch with 20 silver pieces.
- A wooden shield¹¹ carved in a pattern of twisting vines.
- Dagger, steel with a leather wrapped hilt and a ruby on the pommel. Balanced beautifully, when thrown it has a range of 100' and a +2 Missile OB.
- Tapestry¹² of gold, silver, bronze, and copper threads. It depicts a sumptuous feast.
- Parchment¹³, plain and unadorned.
- Necklace with gold links in the form of snakes. The necklace consists of twelve links, the eyes of each snake are small rubies. The necklace is not magical, but would be worth 300 gold coins to a wealthy buyer.

- Chain mail of Dwarf make. Sized for a Dwarf, it is not magical but provides +2 to *Defense* and causes only a -1 penalty to *Movement*.
- Ring¹⁴ of platinum set with a large emerald.
- Ivory carving in the form of a warrior wearing silver armor. Six inches high, a large sapphire forms the pommel of his sword and he wears a crown of gold and diamonds. The sculpture is very well made and is worth 600 gold coins.
- A slender silver wand¹⁵ topped with a piece of quartz. Along the length of the wand are set a ruby, amber, citrine, emerald, blue topaz, sapphire, and an amethyst.
- A teakwood box¹⁶ inlaid with pearl and bone.
- A book of the history of Cardolan. Somewhat valuable to historians, it also contains the full history of Hir Rusark and his clan.
- A velvet case bearing a single golden dart¹⁷.
- A leather bridle¹⁸ with silver fittings.
- A worn woolen cloak¹⁹.
- A large oak staff²⁰, 5' tall and carved with the head of a dragon. The other end bears an iron spike on the tip.
- A silver bracelet²¹ decorated with small silver bells.
- A pair of worn bone dice²².
- A platinum snuff box with gold inlay of moon and stars. The box is worth 120 gold coins, but is not magical.
- A small silver coffer that holds a jumble of coins minted throughout Endor over the last 500 years. 126 gold pieces in face value, they would be worth as much as 300 gold pieces to a collector.
- A wooden bow²³ of reddish hue.



"We should make haste to leave," Gandalf says at length. "You have wandered a bit south, following the trail of . . . not bandits. And it would ill behoove us to be in these lands at night. I will go with you for a while, as my path now takes me in your direction."

As you leave the barrow and scatter the treasure of Hir Rusark, Gandalf lets out a long shrill whistle. Just as you start to wonder, the whistle is answered. In a few minutes, a beautiful white horse gallops up to Gandalf and greets him.

- If the party had horses or other beasts of burden, go to stage 26.
- Otherwise, go to stage 27.

26

Only moments behind this horse come your beasts, none the worse for their night abroad. They even still bear your gear faithfully.

Gandalf comments "The beasts seem to have more sense than the masters. They ran abroad in the warm air of the open downs rather than enter the cold barrow of a Wight as we did. But come, the glad greetings over we must move onward."

- Go to stage 27.

GM NOTE

Remind the players to add their chosen items to their Character Records. You can have Gandalf tell the player characters which items are magical, and what they do, or the PCs can find out for themselves by using *Item Analysis* spells.

The following list describes the special powers of the magical items.

- 1 The dagger is Elven, made for a Prince. When using it vs. Undead, add +2 to your *Melee OB*. The hilt is cold-forged iron, rubbed with silver oxide.
- 2 The three runes ask for protection, but are not magical. However, the sword cannot be lost accidentally. If its owner is more than 50 feet from the sword, he or she is aware of the direction and distance of the weapon. If the owner sells or barter the item, the effect ceases.
- 3 The Hobbit-sized arrows are Elven. When using one of these arrows, add +1 to your *Missile OB*.
- 4 This cudgel has been weighted with lead through a core taken from the end and replaced, then enchanted. Add +2 to your *Melee OB* when using it.
- 5 This scarab, from far-off Harad, allows you to add +1 to your *Defense bonus* when you are wearing it.
- 6 Add +2 to your *Movement bonus* while you are wearing this pin. It was made for a silver-haired Elven princess who long ago sought the Grey Havens.
- 7 The handsome, heavy pectoral doubles the healing rate of the wearer. Because of its weight, count it as a piece of equipment when figuring maximum equipment limits.
- 8 Add +1 to your *Magical bonus* while you are wearing this Elven circlet. It can be worn under leather or cloth, but not under metal such as chain mail.
- 9 No, this is not Gallind's family heirloom, the Rhîvaran. It is, however, of finest Elven work, and allows the wearer to climb trees with a +3 bonus.
- 10 The belt seems to be made of Dragon-skin. Add +1 to your *Strength bonus* while you are wearing it.
- 11 When the shield is carried, the user can pass through the thickest woods at his or her normal movement rate. The shield acts as a normal shield in combat.
- 12 The tapestry is enchanted to feed its owner. Once per week, it will summon forth table and chairs and a meal that will serve ten people. The meal lasts for three hours if not eaten.
- 13 When the word "observe" is uttered by the holder, the parchment records an exact replica of what the holder sees. All details are reproduced perfectly regardless of whether the holder was focusing on them. The command word "forget" erases the parchment. It can be used once per day.
- 14 The ring allows the wearer to cast 6 points worth of spells every day without *Taking Damage*.
- 15 When the wand is held, it provides a +3 to all *maneuvers* involving balance and movement.
- 16 Herbs placed in the box will be kept fresh until used.
- 17 When used to attack any servant of the Dark Lord, the dart has a range of 90' and a *Missile OB* of +2 (and +2 to *Damage Taken*). The dart instantly travels back to the hand of the wielder. It is a normal dart when used to attack any creature that does not serve Sauron directly or indirectly.
- 18 When the bridle is placed on a tame horse, mule, or pony, the animal is able to speak and understand Westron. The animal is not charmed in any way, but if it is cooperative it can be guided through complex stunts by speaking alone.
- 19 This travel-stained cloak gives a +1 to the *Subterfuge bonus* and a +1 to *Movement*. The wearer never appears wealthy while wearing the cloak, and is always seen as nothing but a wandering vagabond.
- 20 Usable as a normal spear in melee combat, the staff can also cast three *Fire Bolt* spells per day out of the Dragon's mouth.
- 21 The bracelet is cursed. It affects the wearer as a *Calm* spell until removed by some other person.
- 22 These dice cast a *Luck* spell once per week.
- 23 All arrows fired from this bow burst into flame, doing an additional +2 points of *Damage*. The arrows ignite flammable objects when they hit.

As you go with Gandalf north toward the road, he makes the walk short with tales of the area. "From the thought I caught before I banished him, I suspect this was Hir Rusark Johardur, an ancient Cardolani Irnil or prince, who had made alliance with the Witch-king. He seems to have died of some wasting disease, though of course someone of his mind would always blame his misfortune on others.

"As for your mission," he continues, "I myself espied and avoided a bandit look-out somewhat to the east, in the trees of the ancient kingdom of Rhudaur. I will sketch you such map as I may, just before we part so that it will be fresh in your minds. I recommend that you follow the Road, camping at eventide within sight of it. And be sure to avoid standing stones at night!

"Meanwhile, speaking of Rhudaur, do you know of the Rhudaurian princess Dorrit, who was so beautiful that she had to talk to her suitors from behind a screen, lest she blind them with her beauty?"

You should award *experience points* now.

The characters each get 100 *experience points* if they were able to defeat Dargar. Defeating Hir Rusark is worth 250 *experience points* each. (Even the captive or characters who did relatively little damage should get these *EPs*. Just being present and in danger contributes to the defeat of enemies more than they may realize.)

This is in addition to *EPs* gained for role playing, good ideas, spells cast, and successful *maneuvers*. Add up the figures you've recorded (on page 22 of *The Guidelines* or on a copy of the chart) and write the sums on six scraps of paper. Fold these notes and hand each one to the appropriate player.

"DARKER THAN THE DARKNESS" is now drawing to a close. By turning the page, you can start the next adventure whenever you're ready. In "BAD MEN, FULL O' THIEVERY," Inledair the Bandit-king is at last confronted in all his evil.

The End

BAD MEN, FULL O' THIEVERY



N

ow I won't make so bold as to suggest you should come to the Common Room tonight," said Butterbur. "You'll be tired; and there isn't many folk there this evening, anyway. But if you could spare me half an hour before you go to your beds, I would dearly like to have some talk with you, quiet-like by ourselves."

"... Most of the things which they had to tell were a mere wonder and bewilderment to their host, and far beyond his vision; and they brought forth few comments other than: "You don't say," often repeated in defiance of the evidence of Mr. Butterbur's own ears ..."

But he did say much on his own account. Things were far from well, he would say. Business was not even fair, it was downright bad. "No one comes nigh Bree now from Outside," he said. "And the inside folks, they stay at home mostly and keep their doors barred. It all comes of these newcomers and gangrels that began coming up the Greenway last year, as you may remember; but more came later. Some were just poor bodies running away from trouble; but most were bad men, full o' thievery and mischief. And there was trouble right here in Bree, bad trouble. Why, we had a real set-to, and there were some folk killed, killed dead! If you'll believe me."

"... And now they've gone for robbers and live outside, hiding in the woods beyond Archet, and out in the wilds north-away. It's like a bit of the bad old times tales tell of, I say. It isn't safe on the road and nobody goes far, and folk lock up early. We have to keep watchers all round the fence and put a lot of men on the gates at nights."

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, page 335**



curtain of ivy hung from the crumbling walls of the ruined tower, and bats circled its eroded crenellations. It looked to be the haunt more of Ghosts than of bandits!

Gláin shivered, remembering how close he had come to death in the barrow of the Wight Rusark. He and his friends might not be so lucky in another encounter with Undead. "All praise and honor to Mahal," murmured the Dwarf. "May He grant us paths far from the dead who walk."

• ONE •

INTRODUCTION

You're about to experience the final adventure in the first trilogy of the *Lord of the Rings Adventure Game*. Find your lucky dice, round up your players, and get ready for some cliff-hanging action!

If it's been a while since you played "DARKER THAN THE DARKNESS," read aloud the summary below to refresh everyone's memory. (If for some reason you haven't and can't play the previous adventure, give each PC 350 *experience points* and give one item to each from the treasure listed on page 43.)

Then, while your players update their Character Records, read silently to yourself **THE TALE, SECRETS**, and **"THIEVING RUFFIANS."** When you've finished, turn to **SCENE ONE** on page 55 to begin.

"DARKER THAN THE DARKNESS"

Awakened at dawn by Nob pounding on the door of your rooms at *The Prancing Pony*, you learned that Mistress Groundsel's chimney had burst into flames in the night. It seemed that all of Bree-land had congregated at the inn to talk about the event and tell you — as the local heroes from the tangle with Trolls — about it.

A few surly individuals implied that the fire was the work of bandits, and therefore your fault since you did not prevent them. But Shirriff Bunce and most sensible folk knew that that was nonsense. They did hope, however, that you might take on the challenge of defeating the bandits spoken of by Nat and Gil. And they were right to hope.

You set off the very next day to find Inledair the Bandit-king and end his domination of the Great East Road. Unfortunately, you suffered a misadventure during your travels. Summoned through magic to the barrow of the Wight Rusark, you faced a foe more terrifying than any mere mortal. Desperate courage and a little luck enabled you to survive the Wight and his Skeleton minions.

After the Undead were dispelled, freedom under the night sky seemed more precious than the jeweled treasures gleaming in the now-empty barrow. Yet, Gandalf (who was present once again and seemed capable of keeping his fingers in every pie in Middle-earth) urged you to claim a few items for your own.

Making camp with you nearer the Road, the Wizard sat at your fire and told tales of the darkened kingdom of ancient Rhudaur. His subject was not chosen at random. For there, amidst the ruins of a Rhudaurian keep, lurks the Bandit-king and his men.

THE TALE

A dagger thudded into the heart of a wooden target. Across the room, a woman picked up another dagger, then tossed it to land neatly beside the first. Maisi threw a third blade just as a tall young man tripped over a chair in front of the target.

"Look out, Maisi!" the man squeaked, picking himself up from the floor. "You nearly hit me that time."

"I'm sorry, Damah," the woman responded, her voice soft and caressing. "It's dark in here; I didn't see you." A fourth dagger, embedding itself near the other three, gave the lie to Maisi's excuse, but Damah believed her. Most men believed Maisi: although she wasn't technically beautiful, she was very pretty. A slender, doe-eyed creature, Maisi looked fragile, helpless, and delicate. In fact, she was strong, ruthless, and a capable killer.

Maisi's husband, who sat watching her, did not believe her lie. An intelligent man, Acair understood Maisi fairly well. Acair was as cold-blooded and competent as Maisi, but he was more ambitious. He had no intention of spending the rest of his life as second-in-command to this dirty little band of thieves. Maisi lacked Acair's ambition, but she understood his desire; and since she loved him, as far as she was capable of love, she helped him achieve his goals. She was an able assistant.

"Damah," Maisi crooned, "I've thrown my last dagger. Be a love, and bring them to me."

Acair's ugly face was, as ever, inscrutable, but across from him, Broc grimaced. Damah obediently collected the daggers and returned them to Maisi. On his way, he tripped over a table leg and stumbled, but managed to remain upright. Had he fallen, clutching the knives, he would probably have ended his short life.

He would have died unlamented. Nobody — excepting Inledair, of course — knew why Damah was accepted in their little band. Had Acair been in charge, he would have killed Damah immediately: he did not approve of the clumsy fool. Really, Acair

thought, Damah is an inept bandit. Although he was big and strong, he was far too clumsy to be a good fighter. He was stupid, too: he had been known to confuse directions and do the wrong thing during an ambush. Just last week, he had fired his crossbow at a caravan before it reached the boulder, when he'd been told not to shoot until after it was past. All three wagons had turned and escaped. Damah on our side, Acair thought irritably, is worse than a great warrior fighting against us.

Acair looked up to find Broc watching him, his gaze ironic. Acair knew that Broc, too, disliked Damah; but he was aware that most of the Man's scorn was directed at Maisi. Broc didn't like women, particularly intelligent women. But Broc was a wonderful swordsman and a fair tactician, so Acair was able to overlook his prejudice. Still, Acair was annoyed by Broc's familiar attitude, and looked away.

There were two other Men in the smoky cellar. Gisulf sat beside Broc, across from Acair at the table. Gisulf's nose was twitching slightly, making him look even more rat-like than normal. Although he was not very intelligent, Gisulf was acceptable to Acair. Gisulf certainly lacked subtlety, but he was a vicious fighter. At the moment, he was venting his chronically nasty temper on Athaulf.

"Good thing that pell isn't going anywhere, Athaulf," Gisulf was saying. "With an attack like that you'd be sure to miss a moving target."

Athaulf's hand, tightening on his sword hilt, gave the only indication that he had heard Gisulf's taunts. Broc laughed. This could lead to the sort of scene he loved. Gisulf was too simple to realize that the blonde, dreamy-eyed Athaulf was far more malevolent than Gisulf himself. Athaulf was clever, too; he might find some interesting ways to take revenge on Gisulf.

Acair opened his mouth to stop a potential fight between two of his better henchmen, as Maisi, unconcerned, tossed another blade. But it was not Acair's voice that stopped the argument.

"My lovely Maisi, you are practicing again. So admirable." Inledair's voice was almost purring as he entered the room. "And Athaulf. You, too, are hard at work." Inledair, the Bandit-king, beamed at everyone, and took a vacant chair next to Acair.

A silence fell over the room; even Maisi stopped throwing knives and moved a little closer to her husband. Damah felt slightly sick. What had Inledair been doing, to put him in such a pleasant mood? A constraint fell over everyone except Athaulf. In his sweet blue eyes there was an avid glow: Athaulf shared Inledair's predilection for cruelty.

Inledair was cruel. He was not, like Maisi, simply merciless: he truly enjoyed hurting any living creature. Although he was completely insane, he was cunning. Excepting Athaulf, who was nearly as maniacal as Inledair himself, all the bandits feared Inledair. Acair knew, though, that one day Inledair's murderous instincts would take him too far. He looked forward to that day, believing that, when the time came, Acair would become the Bandit-king.

SECRETS!

It may be helpful for you to know what will happen during "BAD MEN, FULL O' THIEVERY." Read on, but don't tell your players! They're supposed to be surprised.

Scene One: Gandalf the Grey tells the party how to find the place where Nat and Gil met the bandits. He also gives them a very useful spell.

Scene Two: The party travels to the trysting-place, locates the bandits' watchpoint, and plans an attack.

Scene Three: The PCs attack the sentinels, and find the path to the main hideout.

Scene Four: The PCs attack the bandits in their hideout. After disposing of the wicked highwaymen, the PCs search the hideout for loot.

Scene Five: The victorious (and well-to-do) PCs travel to Rivendell, where Elrond praises their courage and admires the spoils of war.

Now you're prepared to lead your PCs to victory, so pour yourself something to drink, warm up your dice, and read through "THIEVING RUFFIANS" for descriptions of the Bad Guys. Then go ahead with SCENE ONE. Gandalf is waiting for you.

"THIEVING RUFFIANS"

This section gives basic descriptions of the brigands. For fighting (and other) statistics, see page 54.

Inledair the Blackhearted

Inledair is short and swarthy, but attractive. His hair is almost black, and cropped short; he has a thick mustache. Bushy black brows almost hide his eyes, but his features are good. Well-muscled arms and legs, along with a broad chest and shoulders, attest to his physical prowess. Inledair is invariably clad in dusky-green tunic and breeches, and black boots.

A cruel Dunlending, Inledair took early to a life of crime. He grew up in the foothills of the White Mountains, one of a large family. Most of his relatives were devout worshipers of Sauron. Inledair was taught early to hate the Dúnedain, and to do anything in his power to destroy them. As Inledair's strength grew, so did his wickedness. His carefully nourished hatred grew to encompass most of Eru's creatures. At sixteen, Inledair killed his brother during an argument. He ran away from his parents' wrath, and went to live in Calembel, a town in southern Gondor.

Inledair did well in Calembel. He stole and killed, and soon developed a band of followers. The followers changed over the years, as new members joined and old ones were brought to justice or killed. Eventually, Inledair's success as a criminal attracted Broc, Acair and Maisi.

After eight years of terrorizing Calembel, Inledair was betrayed by one of his followers. He fled the town with some of his band, and made his way north. Eventually, he settled in an abandoned keep along the Great East Road.

The other bandits obey Inledair mostly because they are afraid of him; but he is charismatic. He can be very persuasive, although people who have come to see him for what he is are rarely deceived by him. A consummate liar, Inledair can't even be trusted to report the weather accurately. Savage and bloodthirsty, he enjoys torturing and killing other Humans; also Elves, Dwarves, animals and insects. Inledair is sure that he is the only being on Middle-earth who has any importance at all. Although he is insane, his only real intellectual shortcoming is his inability to understand anyone else's point of view.

Acair

Short, rotund and balding, Acair is an ugly man. He has a large nose and a disfiguring birthmark on his left cheek. His nose is long; his eyes small and deep-set. Although he is obese, Acair is strong.

In his youth, Acair was a warrior of Gondor. If promotion had been given for nothing other than leadership and fighting ability, Acair would quickly have been made an officer, and probably distinguished himself in battle. Unfortunately, Acair was a Dunlending and a peasant, with no opportunity for advancement. Although he was a good warrior, Acair was ultimately discharged for flouting authority.

After his discharge, Acair travelled to Calembel, where he met Maisi. Like many Men before him, Acair fell in love. Unlike those other Men, Acair was a shrewd judge of human character, and enough of a reprobate to recognize his match.

Acair and Maisi worked together for several years before they met Inledair. Inledair was impressed with Acair, and offered to make him his second-in-command. Hungry for power, Acair joined Inledair's band.

More creative than Inledair, Acair is even more of an asset at the keep than he was in town. Acair follows orders well, improving upon them when necessary, and is waiting for the right time to supplant Inledair as the leader of the bandits. While Acair seems stupid, he is very intelligent. It was his idea to relocate the band to the Great East Road, and to use the bandits' fences (Nat and Gil in Bree) to provide information on travellers.

Maisi

Maisi is pretty, a brown-haired, slender, sweet-faced woman. She has huge, dark-lashed hazel eyes, and a perfect nose. Her mouth is crooked but appealing. Thick, curling hair frames her face and tumbles down her back. Maisi uses her looks, as she uses her fighting and stealing abilities, to get what she wants.

Like Inledair, Maisi is completely self-centered. She took to stealing because it was easier than farming. Small and graceful, Maisi learned quickly to melt into the shadows. She was dextrous enough to learn to pick locks, and quickly became adept at knife-throwing. Since she felt no pity for her victims, Maisi was a good thief.

Maisi worked alone in Calembel. Her favorite routine was to find a man, take him home, kill and rob him. She brought Acair home as she had others, but Acair was too smart, and too good a fighter, to let himself be killed. Maisi and Acair worked and lived together for five years, until they got drunk one night and got married. The same year, they met Inledair.

Maisi is a great asset to Inledair's band. She does her work efficiently and well: neither emotion nor greed cloud her judgement. Like her husband, Maisi is even more useful in her new surroundings. She has lured travellers into abandoned caves to kill and rob them; she has distracted parties with her tales of misadventure while her colleagues surrounded them.

Not even Inledair dares to offend Maisi: all the bandits know that, soon or late, a dagger between the ribs would follow any unwelcome attentions.

Broc

Broc has brown hair and eyes, and a thin face. His build is slight; his height, average. Broc is slender, but not skinny. Acair's contemporary, Broc has fine lines around his eyes and mouth.

The son of an indigent man who drank more than he worked, Broc was once extremely poor. His small farm had more rocks than soil, and game animals were few; so Broc turned to the only trade that offered him a chance at wealth. He worked for a while as a thief in Lamedon. When people became suspicious, he moved south to Calembel. Inevitably, he ran into Maisi. He dislikes Maisi, but has a grudging respect for Acair.

After Inledair moved to town, Broc got into a territorial argument with one of Inledair's band, and murdered the thief. Acair interceded on Broc's behalf; Inledair chose to be amused, and invited Broc to join him. Broc, seeing an opportunity for more income, did.

Although Broc is fairly ordinary looking, he is both charismatic and a persuasive speaker. Unlike Inledair, Broc can see another person's point of view; he isn't swayed by their wishes, but can use his understanding of others to choose arguments that will appeal to them. He has frequently convinced people that he is a good, altruistic individual who is completely innocent of any crime.

Broc is a good fighter, despite his size. He owes much to his dexterity, and his ability to surprise his opponents. Broc isn't interested in power, but loves money.

Damah

Damah has a round face, big eyes, and a snub nose. His brown hair is bound by a leather thong; his brown tunic and breeches are a little short. He wears sandals because he hasn't been able to steal boots that fit him.

As a farmboy, Damah was taunted by some of his peers, and didn't feel that his elders respected him. He thought that, as a criminal, he would be feared and respected, so he ran away from home and went to Calembel. Inledair discovered Damah when the boy was attempting to rob a man in a crowded street. The man chased Damah into an abandoned house; Inledair killed the man and brought Damah home with him.

Despite his best efforts, Damah is an incompetent thief. He does have some talent at tracking, riding, and swimming (all learned in his youth in the country). Damah is the youngest bandit, and the clumsiest. He hasn't yet reached his full stature, but his height is already impressive. Perhaps because of his quick growth, Damah is always tripping or stumbling.

Although (justly) terrified of Inledair, Damah is naive enough to believe that Acair and Maisi are his friends. For fear of Inledair, Damah will commit any number of atrocious acts; he doesn't have much of a conscience, but doesn't actually enjoy fighting or killing.



Athaulf

Athaulf is remarkable in that he is the only blonde in the group. His golden hair hangs loose to his shoulders; his eyes are blue and dreamy. There is nothing dreamy about the mind behind the eyes, though: Athaulf is astute, decisive, and vicious. Although he fears Inledair, he admires his ruthlessness; like Inledair, Athaulf is cruel, and delights in harming others.

Athaulf grew up in the streets of Edoras, a child of two assassins. Both parents were brought to justice by the Rohirrim when Athaulf was only eight; he made his living by knifing people in the back and robbing them. As Athaulf grew, he became a competent swordsman, and his exploits became more daring. He worked for some years as a thief in Edoras; when he fell under suspicion, he moved to Calembel. At seventeen, Athaulf attacked Acair and Broc in a deserted street. After they had disarmed him, they took him home to Inledair.

Though a head shorter than Damah, Athaulf is fairly tall. He is graceful and powerful; a dangerous opponent.



Gisulf

Gisulf's hair is an indeterminate pale brown; his eyes hazel. His large, pointed nose and sharp-featured face make him look, appropriately, like a rat.

A seventh-generation thief, Gisulf took to fighting and stealing at an early age. Unfortunately, he lacked the finesse of his forbears, who were all respected or even admired. Gisulf's father, a man of unimpeachable reputation who earned his living by stealing from his friends, was so furious with his son that he disowned him. Gisulf made his way to Calembel, to see how much trouble he could cause in a bigger town.

Broc met Gisulf in a tavern. Gisulf bragged so much about his fighting abilities that Broc challenged him to a duel. Although he was drunk, Gisulf acquitted himself fairly well. When Broc learned that Gisulf was a thief as well, he told Inledair about him. Inledair had lost his temper the night before and killed one of his bandits. He was looking for a newcomer.

Gisulf is nasty, belligerent and not terribly intelligent.

Bruad

Impressively broad of shoulder and chest, Bruad is built rather like a bear. He has dark, wavy hair, black eyes, and an olive complexion.

Bruad, like Acair, was once a warrior of Gondor. When his lord was killed, Bruad decided not to fight to the death. He ran away from the battle and wandered for several years, working as a mercenary. When Bruad visited Calembel, he ran into Maisi. She took him home to kill him, only to discover that he had the same intention. Bruad was the better fighter; Maisi screamed for Acair, who came to her rescue.

Although Maisi was offended, Acair liked Bruad, and convinced Inledair to take him in. Bruad was a useful addition to Inledair's band: he is aggressive and dangerous. Although he lacks the intelligence of a leader, Bruad is at least shrewd enough to understand his fellow bandits, and to not trust anyone. Bruad is cold and remote; he has no friends, and doesn't seem to feel the lack.

BANDIT STATS

Inledair — Scout

Strength	1	Missile OB	1
Agility	2	General	2
Intelligence	0	Subterfuge	3
Movement	0	Perception	4
Defense	3	Magical	-2
Melee OB	5	Endurance	54

Equipment: Leather Armor, Shield, Sword* (+2OB, +1 Damage), Crossbow (12 bolts, +1 Damage), Belt* (+1 Agility), key, 5gp, 7sp, 11cp.

Acair — Warrior

Strength	2	Missile OB	3
Agility	1	General	1
Intelligence	0	Subterfuge	0
Movement	-1	Perception	1
Defense	3	Magical	-5
Melee OB	5	Endurance	67

Equipment: Leather Armor, Shield, Mace* (+1 OB, +2 Damage vs. Chain and Plate), Crossbow* (12 bolts, +1 OB, +1 Damage), 3sp, 13cp.

Athaulf — Warrior

Strength	2	Missile OB	3
Agility	1	General	1
Intelligence	0	Subterfuge	-1
Movement	-1	Perception	1
Defense	4	Magical	-7
Melee OB	5	Endurance	59

Equipment: Chain Armor* (+1 Movement), Shield, Sword (+1 Damage), Bow (12 arrows), key, 12sp, 9cp.

Gisulf — Scout

Strength	1	Missile OB	0
Agility	1	General	2
Intelligence	0	Subterfuge	1
Movement	0	Perception	2
Defense	3	Magical	-5
Melee OB	3	Endurance	40

Equipment: Leather Armor, Shield, Sword (+1 Damage), 2 Throwing Daggers (-1 Damage).

Brud — Warrior

Strength	2	Missile OB	1
Agility	1	General	1
Intelligence	0	Subterfuge	-3
Movement	-1	Perception	1
Defense	2	Magical	-4
Melee OB	3	Endurance	69

Equipment: Leather Armor, Battle-axe (+2 Damage), Crossbow (12 bolts, +1 Damage), 2sp, 12cp.

Maisi — Scout

Strength	1	Missile OB	4
Agility	1	General	1
Intelligence	0	Subterfuge	2
Movement	1	Perception	3
Defense	3	Magical	-5
Melee OB	2	Endurance	40

Equipment: Shield, Sword (+1 Damage), 6 Throwing Daggers (-1 Damage), Cloak Pin* (+1 Defense), Scarf* (+1 Missile OB when worn on head), key, 16sp, 14cp.

Broc — Scout

Strength	1	Missile OB	-1
Agility	1	General	3
Intelligence	0	Subterfuge	2
Movement	0	Perception	3
Defense	3	Magical	-4
Melee OB	3	Endurance	50

Equipment: Leather Armor, Quarterstaff* (+1 Damage, +1 Defense, appears to be a tall, gnarled walking stick), Crossbow (10 bolts, +1 Damage), Necklace* (+1 Perception), key, 7sp, 10cp.

Damah — Ranger

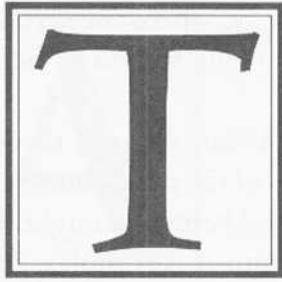
Strength	1	Missile OB	-1
Agility	0	General	3
Intelligence	1	Subterfuge	-3
Movement	-1	Perception	-1
Defense	3	Magical	0
Melee OB	1	Endurance	54

Spells: Item Analysis (3), Clairvoyance (5).

Equipment: Leather Armor, Shield, Warhammer (+2 Damage), Crossbow (8 bolts, +1 Damage).

Notes

- 1) Equipment with special properties has an asterisk (*) after it. The special properties are noted in parentheses. Normal properties for that piece of equipment, except for Damage, are not included in the parentheses. Damage is included so you have the *Total Damage bonus* for that weapon readily available. All other *bonuses* (normal or *Special*) are already incorporated in the *Total bonuses* for each NPC. Example: A Sword (normally +0 OB and +1 Damage) which has +1 OB and +1 Damage as special properties would be written as: sword (+1 OB, +2 Damage).
- 2) The number in parentheses after a spell is the *Damage Taken* each time the spell is successfully cast.



he sky was still dark, but a faint glow on the underbellies of the clouds indicated that the sun would rise soon.

With a slight wrinkling of her brows, Lily turned to Gláin. "I was planning on potato pancakes for breakfast, but — do you think a Wizard would like something so humble as pancakes?"

Gláin laughed. "Wizard or no, Gandalf would have to be an Orc not to like your pancakes, Lily! They'll be just the thing to put a little heart into us all after that dank and musty barrow. I'll beat the eggs, if you like, while you grate the potatoes."

• TWO •

SCENE 1: "THE BUSINESS OF WIZARDS"

GM NOTE

In "DAWN COME EARLY," the PCs battled Nat Groathusk and Gil Mossgrave. Some time later, Gandalf questioned Nat or Gil (or both, if both were alive) and learned more about Inledair the Blackhearted and his bandits. In Scene Two, Gandalf will tell the party what he learned.

I

Read the following material aloud to your players.

Gandalf is sitting by the campfire, blowing smoke rings into the dawn-flushed summer sky. One ring chases another towards the lacey clouds above as Gandalf watches.

He looks harmless enough: just an old man, with a long white beard and bushy eyebrows. He wears a long grey cloak, a silver scarf, and a tall, pointed, blue hat; and he carries a staff. But Gandalf is not just an old man: he is a Wizard.

After the last ring of smoke disappears, Gandalf pulls his cloak closer, and stirs the fire with one large black boot. Turning his piercing gaze on you, he speaks.

"Last night I promised to give you more information about your quest. I will at least get you started in the right direction; the rest is up to you.

"The bandits' lair is located in the Trollshaws, off the East Road, about nine days' ride from here. The brigands man a lookout near the Road. Gil and Nat rode along the Road until the ninth day, when the route curved to the east. A stream follows the curve of the Road; within the creek's bend, twin birches grow. The trees are about ten feet tall, and their branches intermingle.

"Here is a rough map of the spot you'll be looking for." The Wizard hands you a wrinkled square of muslin with untidy ink lines on it. (Show the players the map on page 59.)

"One hundred paces past the birches, there is a grove of pines north of the Road. The trees grow to the edge of the Road. Nat and Gil would enter the grove, and ride through the trees to the northern edge. They then turned to the east, riding under the eaves of the pines to the northeast, until reaching a large boulder. The two ruffians would put a red tablecloth on the rock, then wait until a bandit came to meet them. After that they were blindfolded.

"I don't know what the bandit lookout is — perhaps a large tree. Whatever it is, it certainly overlooks both the boulder and the East Road. You might sit by the boulder — out of sight of course! — and see what you can see.

"Since they were blindfolded, Nat and Gil didn't know much about the thieves' hideout. After walking for perhaps half an hour, they were led down some stairs that seemed regular enough to be man-made. The cloths were taken from their eyes when they were in a room that looked like a cellar. Probably the brigands are in some ruined home or keep: there are several in that region. As to the number of bandits, Nat and Gil have seen five. There may of course be more."

The Wizard stands, shaking the ash from his pipe, and walks to his horse. Replacing the pipe in a saddlebag, Gandalf draws out a scroll, then returns to the fire.

"I learned more from those ruffians than I expected to, and have changed my own plans," he announces. "I had intended to take this scroll to an old friend of mine, Elrond of Rivendell. But I learned that I am needed elsewhere, so it may be some weeks before I can go to Rivendell. If you could bring this to Elrond when you have finished your adventure, my task will be easier."

The PCs will have to decide whether or not to take the scroll to Elrond. The GM may remind the party that it isn't wise to offend a Wizard. Besides, Gandalf is helping them, and they owe him a favor.

- If the PCs agree to take the scroll, go to stage 2.
- If not, go to stage 3.

2

"Thank you for your help," Gandalf says. "For my part, I will give you something else you may find useful. This scroll contains a spell. Círdan the Shipwright found it, and bade me deliver it to Elrond's house. You may be able to learn at least part of the spell. If you can, it could help you in a tight pinch."

If any PC opens the scroll and tries to read it, read the following to him or her:

You can struggle through the first few paragraphs of the scroll, but even that is difficult. With time and help, you might be able to read it all; but the language is complex, and the script difficult to read. The first paragraphs detail a *Sleep* spell. They give enough information for you to learn the basic spell.

If the PCs have already used their *EPs* to learn new spells after "DARKER THAN THE DARKNESS," you may choose to allow one of them to substitute this *Sleep* spell instead.

The spell that Gandalf gave the party follows:

Spell: *Sleep*. **Cost:** 1 point per round of sleep.

Range: One target within 50'.

Effect: Target will fall into an enchanted sleep for 1 round per point of *Damage Taken* for the spell. Example: 1 target for 5 rounds results in 5 points of *Damage Taken*; 1 target for ten rounds results in 10 points of *Damage Taken*.

- Go to stage 3.

3

"I thought you might want extra supplies for your journey. Barley sent along this horse for you. Please bring him back in one piece!

"Now, I must thank you for your hospitality and depart. Indeed, the potato pancakes were delicious! But my time is always short. Good day, and good luck to you!" Gandalf turns to mount his steed. He gallops off as the sun peaks above the horizon; the thunder of his horse's hooves fades quickly in the morning mists.

Gandalf brought a pack-horse along with him, and has left it for the party. The horse is carrying bread, cram, dried meat and fruit, and cheese; enough for 90 meals (or 15 days for a party of 6). Barliman Butterbur also sent along a small keg of beer, and three extra wool blankets.

- Go to SCENE 2: "A TRYSTING-PLACE."



thaulf lay behind a large rock on the top of the hill and surveyed the Road below. Nothing had moved there all morning, and he was longing for a little excitement.

A soft footstep sounded behind him, and Athaulf leapt to his feet, sword in hand. It was Bruad. He, too, held a sword.

"I'm sorry I startled you," Bruad said, his voice mocking. "It was a snake, scaring the horses. Still nothing?"

"No."

Bruad climbed the last few feet to the summit, and lowered his great bulk beside the slender Athaulf. He glanced first at the quiet road, then at the meeting-boulder. A large red cloth was draped over the boulder.

"It's those fools, Nat and Gil. I'll go get them," he said, and slipped back down the slope.

• THREE •

SCENE 2: "A TRYSTING-PLACE"

This Scene consists of three *sequences*.

In "THE GREAT EAST ROAD," the group travels to the boulder where Nat and Gil met the bandits.

"AT THE STONE" has the PCs attempting to locate the bandits' watch-post.

And in "WATCH, AND WAIT, AND THINK," the party plans an attack on the bandits' sentinels.

"THE GREAT EAST ROAD"

The party is now half an hour's walk from the barrow where they adventured in "DARKER THAN THE DARKNESS." They camped just off the Great East Road in the company of Gandalf for the remainder of the night. The Wizard departed at sunrise. When the PCs finish packing their gear for the journey east, you, their fearless Gamemaster, will have several choices.

In the interest of speed or ease, you may choose to allow the PCs to travel uneventfully to the Trollshaws. The journey should take 9 days if the party is riding; 13 if walking. Players should erase rations consumed on the road from their Character Records.

If you want a more realistic game, have the players *roll the dice* to see if they run into trouble on the Road.

- If you opt for speed, go to stage 2.
- If you want more detail, go to stage 1.

I

To determine any difficulties encountered on the Road, have the players make a party *dice roll* (one player, usually the luckiest, will roll for the entire group). Then consult the following table. The chances are good that the trip will go well, but this option takes into account some of the problems that can plague even the best-prepared traveller.

You may wish to explain to your players the procedure you're using.

Before I describe your journey to the Trollshaws, let's determine just how eventful it is! One of you *roll the dice* for the group.

Unmodified

Die Roll: Result:

8 or higher	Congratulations! Good planning and good luck take you to the Trollshaws without incident.
6-7	Rain and mud slow your arrival by half a day.
4-5	Terrible thunderstorms and deep mud slow travel by an entire day.

(see next page for 3 or less)



3 or less

If the party is mounted: One of your horses bruises its hoof on a stone. _____ (the rider) must dismount and lead the horse. The mishap results in a two-day delay.

If the party is on foot: _____ (one of the PCs, use a random die roll) twists his or her ankle and must hobble or walk slowly for a day. The mishap results in a two-day delay.

Read aloud the result from the table.

• *Proceed to stage 2.*

2

Now describe the journey to the players:

Behind you, the Road from Bree passed through farmland and rolling hills. Men and Hobbits lived along the thoroughfare; the aspect was pretty, and there were houses and barns along the way. Near Bree, the Great East Road was much-travelled and kept in good repair.

Now, houses have grown scarce. There are fewer travellers, most of them intent upon their business and anxious to reach civilization. These are the Lone-lands. The Road is rutted and grassgrown. Although there are stands of trees, the

terrain is mostly open. To the right, the South Downs stretch as far as the eye can see. Farther on, the Weather Hills rise north of the Road. Desolate-looking hills edge the horizon, and white mountains, barely visible, loom behind them.

As the hills in the east grow nearer, the landscape becomes more dismal. The winds from the mountains are cold and piercing, even in summer. The hills ahead seem to be brooding. Before you reach them, you cross a river. Born in the springs and melting snows of the Misty Mountains, the Mitheithel is a noisy, rushing grey river. The East Road passes over it on the Last Bridge. Beyond the Mitheithel, to the north, lie the Trollshaws.

Inhabited primarily by Hill Trolls and wolves, the Trollshaws have an evil aura. The trees are somber, and huddled together. Between the copses, open spaces harbor brambles and straggling shrubs. In the east are more gloomy hills. Ancient, ruined castles, as wicked as the Men who once dwelled within, still cling to some of the slopes. The land is forbidding.

• *Go to the next sequence, "AT THE STONE."*

“AT THE STONE”

GM NOTE

If you haven't done so already, now would be a good time to clear the fudge from the center of the table, and replace it with the area map on this page. The players may want to look at the map while you read the following descriptions. And the best place for the fudge is out of the way, perhaps beside the GM.

I

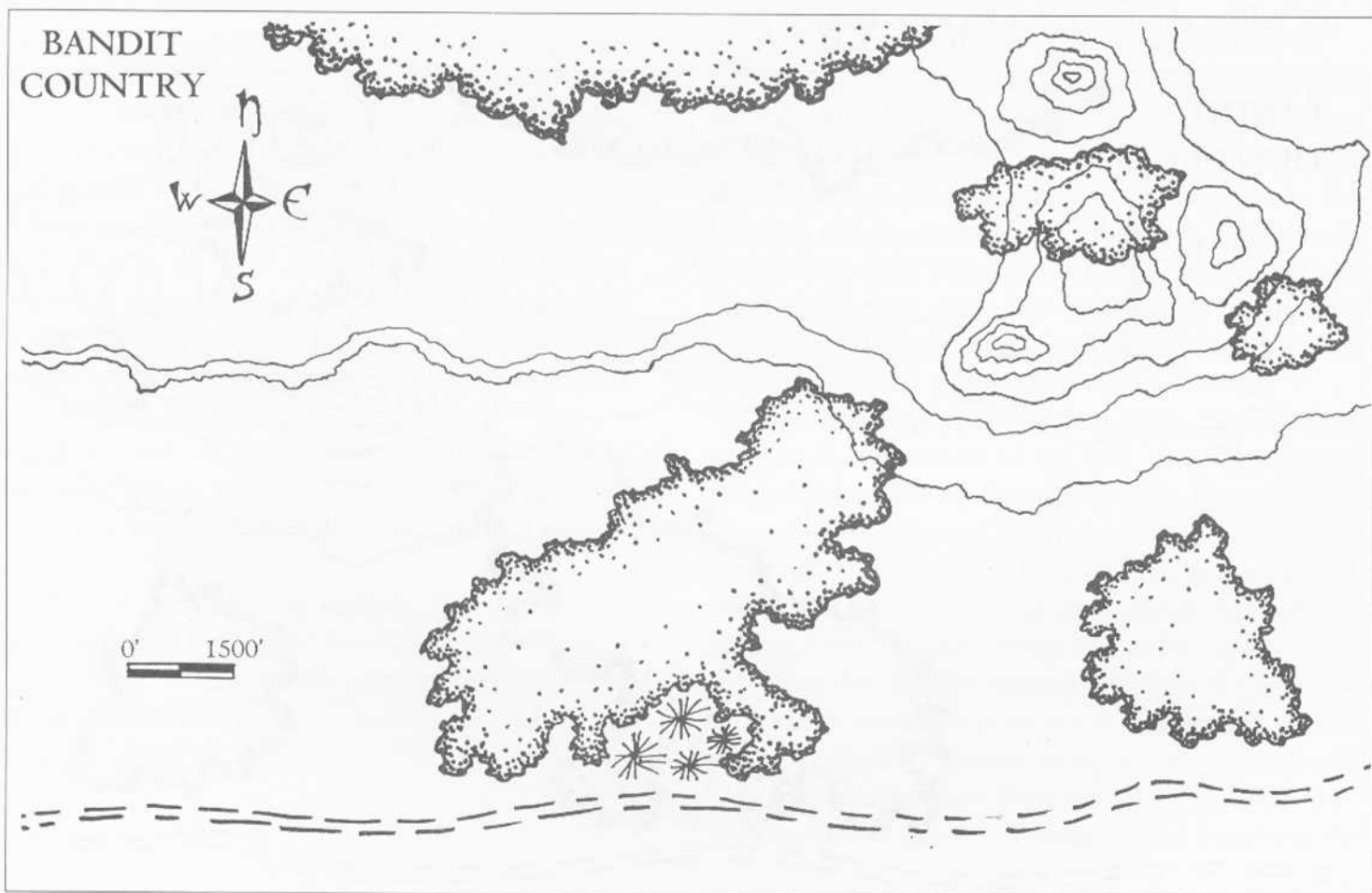
Gandalf's directions are good: the twin birches are as he described them, within the curve of the stream. The pine grove, too, is easy to locate; and once you make your way through the trees and around to the northeast, there is only one large boulder.

Once the PCs have found the boulder where Nat and Gil met the bandits, they should take Gandalf's advice and observe the surrounding area while hiding behind the rock or among the trees. Every party member should *roll the dice* and add his or her *Perception bonus*.

- If the highest *Perception* maneuver is 9 or less, go to stage 2.
- If the highest result is 10-13, go to stage 3.
- For a high *Perception* maneuver of 14 or greater, go to stage 4.

2

A meadow stretches before you, its grasses knee-high on a Man. The grass is studded with flowers: tall indigo spikes, burnt-orange wheels, and yellow clusters. Half a dozen trees grow, singly, in the meadow. A hawk circles lazily in the cloudless sky. There is no sign of the bandits.



Several hundred paces to the north of the boulder, there is a low cliff. Between the meeting-boulder and the escarpment, the grass of the meadow is broken by small shrubs. Above the bluff, the ground continues to rise slowly all the way to the Yfelwood, an ominous forest far to the north. There are scattered trees and bushes on top of the cliff. To the west, the escarpment stretches in an unbroken line as far as can be seen. To the east, the scarp abuts against a ridge of hills. The peak of the nearest hill is about three hundred paces northeast of the meeting-place; others lie beyond. The hills seem cold and forbidding. A flock of birds flies above the closest hill.

• Go to stage 5.

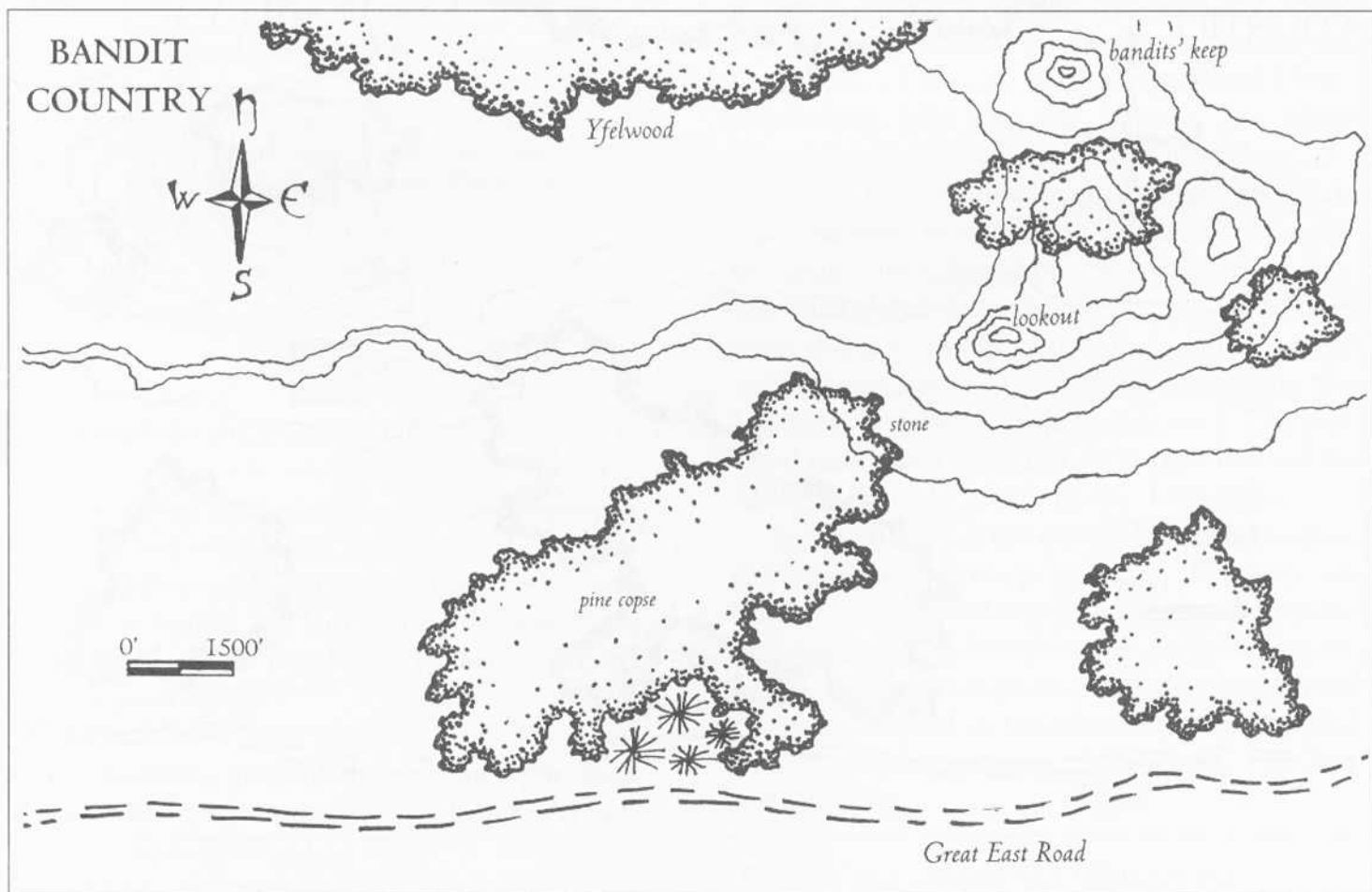


A meadow stretches before you, its grasses knee-high on a Man. The grass is studded with flowers: tall indigo spikes, burnt-orange wheels, and yellow clusters. A hawk circles lazily in the

cloudless sky. Some rustling indicates the presence of small animals in the grass nearby. Half a dozen trees grow, singly, in the meadow. Most of the trees are too small for safe climbing. One is large enough to hide a Man, but the hawk resting in the nest near the top branch has obviously not been disturbed recently.

Several hundred paces to the north of the boulder is a low cliff. Between the meeting place and the escarpment, the grass of the meadow is broken by small shrubs. Above the bluff, the ground continues to rise slowly all the way to the Yfelwood, an ominous forest far to the north. There are scattered trees and bushes on top of the cliff. To the west, the escarpment stretches in an unbroken line as far as can be seen. To the east, the scarp abuts against a ridge of hills. The peak of the nearest hill is about three hundred paces northeast of the meeting-place; others lie beyond. The hills seem cold and forbidding.

In the meadow, the circling hawk has joined his mate in their nest. A flock of blackbirds rises



noisily from the fields above the cliff, and flies southeast. The flock angles to land on the closest hilltop. Suddenly, as though startled, the birds flap skyward. Several large rocks on the top of the hill obscure the view; it is impossible to see what frightened the flock.

• Go to stage 5.

4

A meadow stretches before you, its grasses knee-high on a Man. The grass is studded with flowers: tall indigo spikes, burnt-orange wheels, and yellow clusters. A hawk circles lazily in the cloudless sky. Some rustling indicates the presence of small animals in the grass nearby. Half a dozen trees grow, singly, in the meadow. Most of the trees are too small for safe climbing. One is large enough to hide a Man, but the hawk resting in the nest near the top branch has obviously not been disturbed recently.

Several hundred paces to the north of the boulder is a low cliff. Between the meeting place and the escarpment, the grass of the meadow is broken by small shrubs. Above the bluff, the ground continues to rise slowly all the way to the Yfelwood, an ominous forest far to the north. There are scattered trees and bushes on top of the cliff, but as the cliff does not overlook the East Road, it is unlikely that the bandits' hideout is there. To the west, the escarpment stretches in an unbroken line as far as can be seen. To the east, the scarp abuts against a ridge of hills.

The peak of the nearest hill is about three hundred paces northeast of the meeting-place; others lie beyond. The hills seem cold and forbidding.

In the meadow, the rustling has stilled. The circling hawk has joined his mate in their nest.

A flock of blackbirds rises noisily from the fields above the cliff, and flies southeast. The flock angles to land on the closest hilltop. Suddenly, as

though startled, the birds flap skyward. There is a flash, as of sunlight reflecting from metal, on the hilltop. The flash is followed by movement, as the silhouette of a Man appears. It disappears again immediately, dropping down behind one of the large rocks at the top of the hill.

• Go to stage 5.

5

Hopefully, the PCs now realize that the bandit's watch-post is at the top of the lone hill. If they are having problems, you might (perhaps through an NPC you are playing) remind them that the bandits will want to see both the East Road and the boulder from their lookout. The only location that overlooks both Road and signal point is the hill.

If the PCs made a low roll and are still having problems, they can observe for four hours (game time) and make another *Perception* maneuver.

• Go to "WATCH, AND WAIT, AND THINK," below.

"WATCH, AND WAIT, AND THINK"

Once the PCs have concluded that the watch-post is on the hill, they will need to plan their attack. They should decide, first, how to get to the hilltop, and then, how to attack the bandits on watch. By now, the PCs are wise in the ways of subterfuge, and should realize that their best choice is to sneak up on the bandits. If they want to walk openly across the meadow and shout until a welcoming committee is formed, the GM will need to dissuade them.

Once the PCs have decided to sneak, they will need to plan the best route to the hill. They can choose from three routes to the watchpoint: 1) north, and along the escarpment; 2) northeast, across the meadow; 3) or east along the Road, then north to the back of the hill. The PCs should also decide whether to approach the watchpoint by day or by night.

During the day, the direct path across the meadow offers little cover: the grass is too short, and trees too sparse. If the PCs go east along the Road, they will again be walking where there is little protection. Also, the bandits on watch will probably be watching the

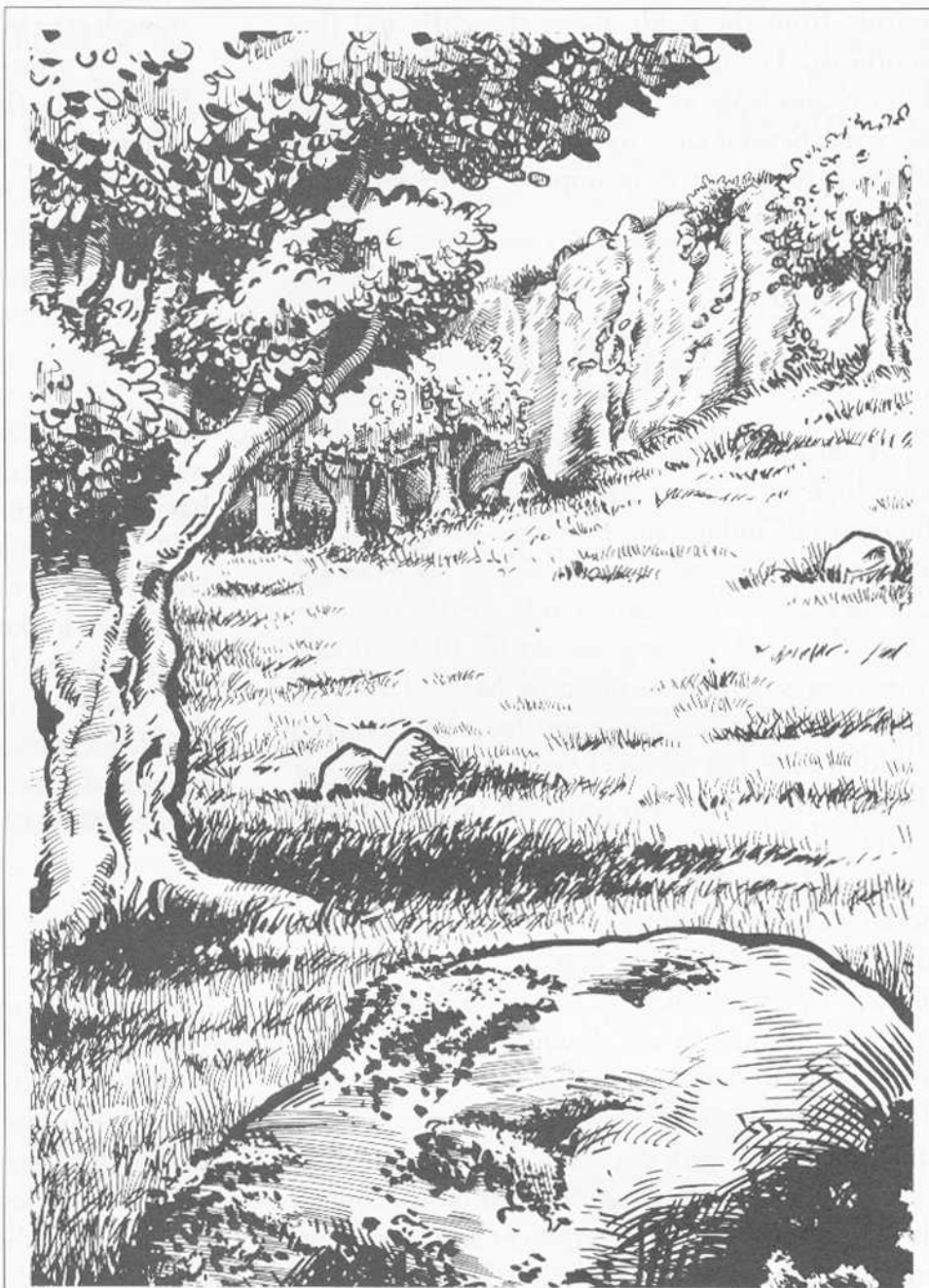
Road, so they are more likely to see the party. Although taking either the direct or the eastern route would be foolhardy while the sun shines, both are possible at night.

Unlike the direct and eastern routes, the northern route is possible by day. Since there are bushes between the boulder and the escarpment, the PCs may choose to move north, from bush to bush, climb the cliff, move from bush to bush on top of the bluff, and climb the lookout hill from the back. The PCs aren't very likely to be seen by the bandits, who should be looking the other way. They will, however, have to cross rougher terrain on this route. Because of the uncertain footing, the northern approach is impassable at night. Horses will have trouble making it up the cliff at all (each horse will need a *General*Δ9 maneuver to make the climb).

If the party has horses, they should decide what to do with them. If they ride to the watchpoint, they will increase their chances of being seen. The best solution might be to leave the horses tied in the woods, with or without a guard.

The PCs will also need to consider how they will go about attacking any bandits on watch. Although they can't prepare for all possibilities, they should create a general plan of attack. You may suggest that the PCs use any available spells to increase the chance of success for any *maneuvers* involved. And if the players haven't thought of it, you can remind them that they will want one bandit alive for questioning, to help find the hideout and to provide information on the other bandits.

• *Go to Scene Three: "THE WATCH-POST."*



GM NOTE

If the PCs seem bent on suicide, for example by riding up the escarpment while singing, you may want to encourage them to reconsider. On the other hand, if they ate all the pizza while you were setting up this adventure, you might want to let them make their own, rash decisions.



thaulf galloped down the hill, his golden hair streaming behind him. Acair followed at a more cautious canter; as he rode, he watched for the other bandits.

Inledair and Bruad reached the Road from the south, just as Athaulf and Acair arrived from the north. Also on schedule, Maisi and Gisulf fell in behind the merchant's caravan. Acair frowned; where were Damah and Broc? And at that moment, Broc arrived, to fall in beside Maisi. He scowled significantly at Acair, and shrugged his shoulders.

'That idiot!' Acair thought, 'Now what's he done? Fallen off his horse? Oh, well,' as he scanned the caravan, 'seven should be enough...and maybe,' he thought, brightening, 'maybe Broc murdered him.'

Inledair levelled his crossbow, and the first driver pulled up.

• FOUR •

SCENE 3: "THE WATCH-POST"

Scene Three consists of three *sequences*.

In "SNEAKING! SNEAKING!," the PCs sneak up on the bandits' watchpoint.

The PCs attack the sentinels in "AT 'EM, LADS!"

And in "TO FIND A PATH," the party discovers the bandits' hideout.

GM NOTE

The bandits do not keep watch after dark, so anyone who approaches the hill after sundown will not be observed. Players who choose to attack at night don't really need to make the *Subterfuge* maneuver in stage 1, since there won't be anyone around to observe them. However, players who don't make the roll may realize before they should that the watch-post is deserted. Have them roll, then ignore the results. If you're feeling vicious, you can look concerned, roll your dice, flip through the rules, shake your head a bit... After all, it never hurts to keep the players guessing.

"SNEAKING! SNEAKING!"

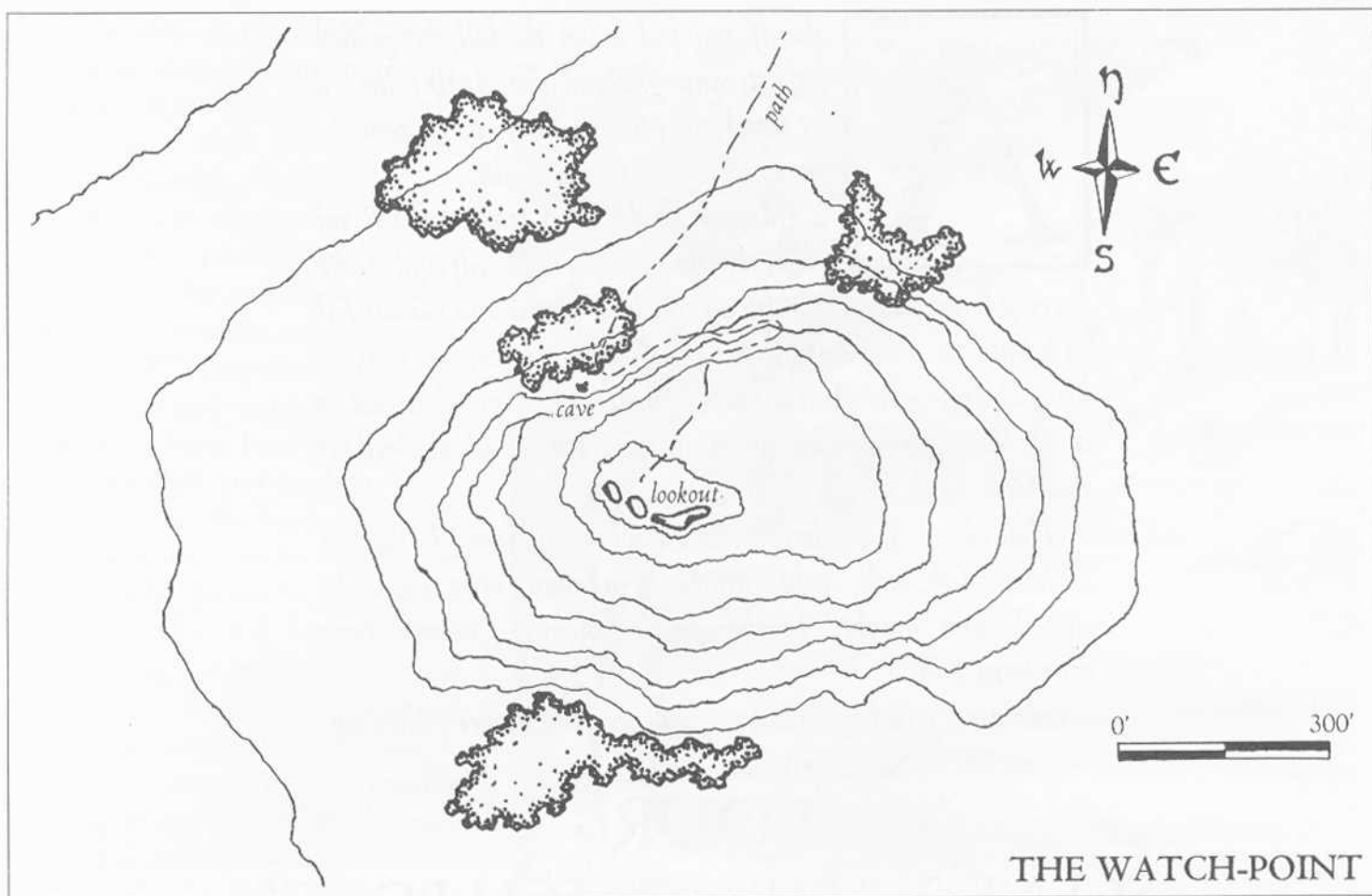


If the PCs are approaching the watch-post by day, they should roll the dice and add their *Subterfuge* bonuses. In addition to any modifiers from the table on page 27 of *The Guidelines*, you may want to include the following:

- a) trying to stay out of sight from the hilltop: +2
- b) moving with horses or ponies: -6
- c) attempting to move silently (once close to hill): +1

You should record everyone's results; they may be further modified by the game sequence.

- If the PCs are taking the northern route, go to stage 6.
- If the party is taking the direct approach at night, go to stage 3.
- If the PCs are taking the East Road at night, go to stage 2.



2

Abandoned at this hour, the Road is illuminated by the light of a full moon. Trees throw eerie shadows across the ground, and creak and moan in the breeze. Bats flutter about the treetops. When you are past the trees, your clothing is whipped about by a biting wind. A shadow passes silently overhead, then stoops down to the meadow beside you; triumphant, the owl rises, again silent, mouse in claw.

Finally, you are abreast of the hill. You leave the Road and start north, across the meadow.

• Go to stage 3.

3

The grass is nearly as tall as a Hobbit; it hides ruts and hillocks, making the walk somewhat difficult even for Elves or Men.

Ask any Hobbits or Dwarves to explain how they plan to cross the meadow. Taller Men or Elves may volunteer to carry the shorter races.

To cross the meadow, each walking PC should roll the dice and add his or her *General bonus*. Walking through the grass is a *General Δ7 maneuver*. Dwarves and Hobbits should subtract 3 from their result. Carried PCs do not need to roll, but will suffer the same fate as the person carrying them. See the following table for the outcome.

Modified

Die Roll

Result

7 or greater

You make it safely across the meadow.

3-6

You trip and fall, scraping your hands on a rock (no Damage).

2 or less

You catch your foot in a rut and wrench your leg (2 points Damage).

• Go to stage 4.

A full moon sheds its yellow light on the meadow. The grass has become a treacherous thing, whispering and clutching at your legs. Small ruts and furrows are hidden by the lush growth, making the footing uncertain.

As you struggle through the meadow, a frog croaks nearby. As if following its lead, wolves begin to howl.

The wolves become quieter as you reach the foot of the hill; they sound farther away. Although the hill is fairly steep, grass is sparse on the rocky slopes; and while the climb is tiring, it is not dangerous. There are bushes and large rocks scattered on the hillside. Boulders ring the crown of the hill.

Behind the boulders, there is a small pile of firewood and a ring of ash. Although the ashes are still warm, the watchpoint seems deserted. Even in the moonlight, boot prints are clearly visible near the pile of wood. The prints lead to a trail that takes you down the far side of the hill. Halfway down, there is a large cave mouth. It is too dark to see anything inside the cave, but it smells of horse.

If the PCs wish to explore the cave, by torchlight they will find hay, horse manure, and rings driven into the walls.

- Go to stage 5.

GM NOTE

If no one suggests remaining to ambush the sentinels, you can give some broad hints. Obviously the watch-post has been used recently (remember the warm ashes?). And what's the point of watching after dark? The bandits wouldn't be able to see the Road, would they? If the sentinels are coming back, when can you expect them? Ambushing the bandits is a good idea, since the PCs may kill one or more ruffians apart from the large group, or may capture one to gain information.

The boot prints that the PCs have been following disappear into the cave mouth. There are hoof prints issuing from the cave, but it is too dark to discern a trail outside the cave mouth.

The PCs can either wait until morning and follow the trail, or set up an ambush for the bandits and wait for the morning watch. (Give 10 Idea *experience points* to the one who suggests an ambush.)

- If the PCs are setting up an ambush, go to stage 12.
- If the party wants to follow the tracks at dawn, go to stage 14.

As you carefully make your way from bush to bush, it seems that the meadow has become a living, and noisy, thing. Rodents squeal, birds squawk overhead, and bees and flies buzz around you. All of them seem to be pinpointing your whereabouts, telling the world that you are here.

The cacophony follows you to the escarpment. The bluff is only twenty feet tall, and offers plenty of hand- and footholds; but there are loose rocks. Worse, there is very little to hide behind, so as you scale the cliff you will be exposed to any watching eyes. But the climb would be impossible under cover of darkness.

- If the PCs reconsider, and decide to cross the meadow at night, go to stage 3.
- If they decide to wait until dark, then take the East Road, go to stage 2.
- If they wish to climb the escarpment, go to stage 7.

Climbing the escarpment is a *GeneralΔ8* maneuver. With a modified die roll of 8 or higher, the PC will climb the cliff without problem. With a result of 4-7, the PC slips and slides part-way down the cliff, but takes no Damage. With a result of 3 or less, the PC falls down the escarpment, becomes bruised and battered, and takes 3 points Damage. Anyone who falls will need to subtract 1 from the *Subterfuge* maneuver made in stage 1.

- Go to stage 8.

The plain at the top of the cliff looks much like the meadow below. The grass is not quite as thick, but the bushes grow even closer, so it is easier to hide. You make your way across the plain to the base of the hill.

The hill is an arduous, but not dangerous, climb. Grass is sparser on the rocky slope, but there are brambles, shrubs, and boulders to hide behind.

- If all the PCs have an 8 or higher for their *Subterfuge* maneuvers (from stage 1 and stage 7), go to stage 13.
- If any players have less than an 8, go to stage 9.

When you are halfway up the hill, the silence is broken by a horse's sharp whinny.

Alerted by the horse, Gisulf will slink to a boulder on top of the hill, and scan the slopes below. He will see one or more PCs, and return to tell Damah.

- If Gisulf sees one or two PCs (i.e., if one or two PCs have less than an 8 on their *Subterfuge* maneuvers), go to stage 10.
- If Gisulf sees three or more PCs (three or more PCs have less than 8 for their *Subterfuge* maneuvers), go to stage 11.

Damah has a crossbow. He will remain hidden, with Gisulf, until the PCs are about twenty yards away. When the PCs are that close, Damah will feel that they are, in fact, looking for the watch-post. Feeling threatened, he will fire once at the PC with the lowest number for his or her *Subterfuge* maneuver. The PC won't have any opportunity to duck or hide.

After Damah shoots, the PCs may close to attack, run away, or hide. If they hide or run, Damah will continue to shoot. If they close to attack, he will shoot until the nearest PC is five yards away, when he will drop the crossbow and draw his sword. Depending on how quickly the PCs close, he may not even have time to fire a second bolt.

- Go to the next sequence, "AT 'EM, LADS!" on page 68.

As you hide, the hillside again becomes quiet. But after several minutes the stillness is broken again, this time by the sound of hooves. More than one horse is galloping away, apparently down the northwest slope. Although you strain your eyes, you can see nothing.

When the PCs make their way to the top of the hill, they will find it abandoned. A pile of logs lies beside the remains of a small fire. The hilltop is ringed by boulders; the PCs can remain on the hill, hidden by the rocks or by bushes, and ambush the bandits when they return. They can also try to follow the retreating bandits.

- If the PCs remain to ambush the bandits, go to stage 12.
- If the PCs track the horses, go to "TO FIND A PATH," on page 71.

GM NOTE

The bandits will not return until morning, just after sunrise. Once the sun sets, the party will no longer be able to track the horses.

12

The PCs pass an uneventful night.

Shortly after sunrise, two bandits will ride up the hill. They will stop at the cave and leave their horses, then walk single-file up the path to the watch-post.

Although the ruffians make this trip frequently, they are not unwary. They will come quietly, with weapons near to hand; and they will scan the countryside as they travel.

The PCs have several choices of where to wait in ambush. Depending on their choice, they may face the bandits on horseback or on foot, on the hillside or on the summit. To determine whether the brigands can see the PCs before they attack, the GM should *roll the dice* for the bandits and add their *Perception* bonuses. They will need a modified die roll of 13 to spot the PCs. If the brigands see the ambush (or are attacked by the party) while on horseback, they will run for the Keep. If on foot, they will run if they are far enough away to make escape possible. The thieves would prefer to run towards the horses, and escape on horseback.

- If the party manages to engage the highwaymen in combat, go to the following sequence, "AT 'EM, LADS!"
- If the bandits escape, go to "TO FIND A PATH," on page 71.

13

A ring of boulders crowns the top of the hill. You creep up to the boulders, and hide behind the nearest one. Two Men are lying in a small hollow on the hill's summit. They are looking at the Road, and talking quietly. Even though it's summer, the day is chill; the Men have a small fire burning.

The PCs may attack before the thieves have a chance to react. Although the brigands have their weapons beside them, they will need one round to fully prepare for battle. Thus, the PCs may take one round of action before the bandits can strike back.

- Go to "AT 'EM, LADS!" on page 68.



14

The PCs pass an uneventful night.

In the grey dawn, the trail is difficult to follow. The hoof prints are mingled with footprints; some lead up the hill, some make a confusing pattern around the cave mouth. The rocky soil helps to hide the trail.

As the light grows brighter, you discover a path leading east, into a brake of trees. Even as you turn to follow it, you glimpse two horsemen, riding towards you through the woods. Both riders have seen you; immediately, they turn and canter away, disappearing into the woods.

- Go to "TO FIND A PATH," on page 71.

"AT 'EM, LADS!"

I

Neither Damah nor Gisulf is exceptionally brave. Both would rather flee to the Keep than out-fight the PCs; they will use any opportunity they can seize to run away. If they can, the ruffians will escape on horseback. Neither bandit will make any effort to help the other escape.

To engage the bandits, use the **COMBAT** action sequence in *The Guidelines* on pages 25-26. "THIEVING RUFFIANS," on pages 50-53, gives descriptions of the brigands; their skills and weapons are detailed on the chart on page 54.

- If any bandit(s) is already mounted when attacked, and manages to flee, go to stage 7.
- If an escaping bandit(s) is on foot, but gets past all the PCs between himself and his horse, go to stage 2.
- If an escaping bandit is on foot, and cannot get to his horse, go to stage 6.
- If neither bandit escapes, but at least one bandit is captured, go to stage 8.
- If both bandits are killed, go to the next sequence, "TO FIND A PATH," on page 71.

GM NOTE

If a brigand flees, you can ignore any PCs who are not directly involved in pursuing the running bandit until he is either caught or escapes entirely. If other PCs are still fighting a thief, you might want to divide the group. Put the fighters on hold while you deal with the escapee. Once the fleeing cutpurse is either back in combat or truly gone, you can put the pursuers on hold and return to the fighters. When the fighters have used as many rounds of game time as the pursuers used, the former pursuers can resume action.



2

If the PCs ambush the bandits at the watch-post, the cutpurses are 400' from the horses in the cave. If the ambush takes place on the hillside, you will have to look at the map and ascertain how far a fleeing ruffian is from his horse. Once you've determined the distance, roll the dice to see how far the fleeing brigand(s) go in the first round. Allow the pursuing PCs to do the same. If the PCs catch the bandit(s) before he reaches his horse, combat will resume. If the opportunity arises for the ruffian to flee again, he will.

Continue to roll the bandit's movement until combat resumes, or the thief reaches a horse. If a brigand gets to a horse, you should roll the dice for him to see if he escapes. Whether or not the cut-purse can escape depends on how close the pursuit is: if the PCs are hot on his heels (i.e., the closest PC is less than 180' behind), escaping will be a *GeneralΔ11* maneuver. If the closest PC is 180-300' behind the retreating brigand, a successful escape is a *GeneralΔ8* maneuver. If the closest PC is more than 300' behind the bandit, escaping is an *GeneralΔ6* maneuver. If the brigand fails his maneuver, combat will resume. Anytime there is an opportunity for escape, the bandit will attempt to flee.

- If the bandit does not escape, return to stage 1.
- If the bandit succeeds in escaping, but the closest PC is within 180' of him, go to stage 3.
- If the bandit escapes, and the nearest PC is 180-300' behind him, go to stage 4.
- If the bandit escapes, and the closest PC is more than 300' behind, go to stage 5.

Clinging to his horse's bare back, the bandit canters out of the cave. He is lying on the horse's neck, and still squirming to find his seat; but he is a good enough rider to stay on the animal. As the brigand settles himself, the horse lengthens his stride, and is soon galloping down the hill at a dangerous pace. The horse, however, knows the trail, and keeps his footing; he ducks into the brake of trees, and disappears from sight. The sound of retreating hoof beats echo, mockingly, on the hillside.

You cannot catch the horse. The PCs should regroup and complete any unfinished business at the lookout.

- If other PCs are fighting the other bandit, *return to stage 1.*
- If the battle is over, and the PCs have a prisoner, *go to stage 8.*
- If the battle is over, and there is no prisoner, *go to "TO FIND A PATH," on page 71.*

You arrive in time to see the bandit disappear into the grove of trees. He is riding without a saddle, but moving at a gallop; there is no hope of your catching him. The sound of retreating hoof beats echo, mockingly, on the hillside.

Before tracking the horse, the PCs should regroup and take care of any unfinished tasks at the watchpoint.

- If other PCs are fighting the other bandit, *return to stage 1.*
- If the battle is over, and the PCs have taken a prisoner, *go to stage 8.*
- If the battle is over, and there is no prisoner, *go to "TO FIND A PATH," on page 71.*

As you reach the cave where the horses are kept, you hear hoof beats. The sound is coming from the trees below; although you cannot see the bandit, you can hear him, retreating at full gallop. There is no hope that you can catch him.

Before attempting to follow the bandit, the PCs should regroup, and deal with any unfinished business at the lookout.

- If other PCs are still fighting the other bandit, *return to stage 1.*
- If the battle is over, and the PCs have a prisoner, *go to stage 8.*
- If the battle is over, and there is no prisoner, *go to "TO FIND A PATH," on page 71.*

If a bandit cannot get to his horse to escape, he may try to either hide or run. If he hides, and the party looks for him, *roll the dice* for the cut-purse and add his *Subterfuge* bonus. The PCs who are seeking the thief should *roll the dice* and add their *Perception* bonuses. If the brigand has the higher result, he stays hidden; if the party does, they find him.

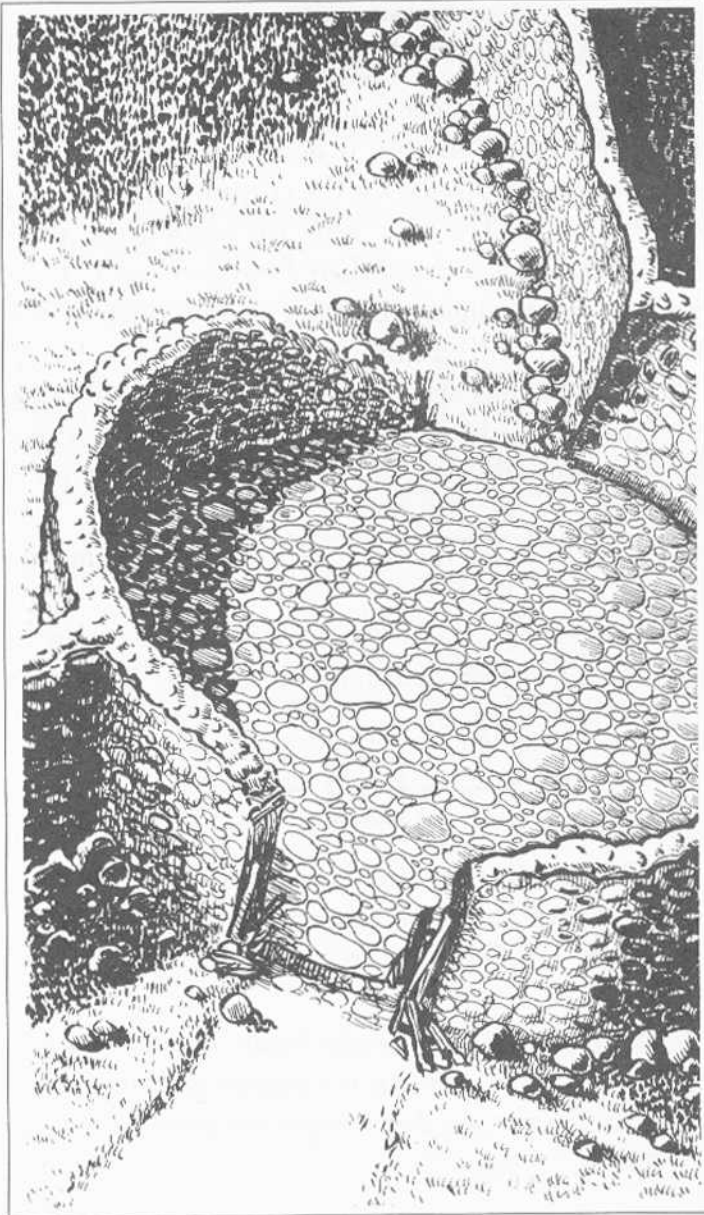
If the thief runs away, *roll the dice* to see whether he can out-run any pursuers. If the bandit does escape, he will eventually make his way back to the Keep on foot.

- If other PCs are still fighting the other bandit, *return to stage 1.*
- If the battle is over, and the PCs have a prisoner, *go to stage 8.*
- If the battle is over, and there are no prisoners, *go to "TO FIND A PATH," on page 71.*

The bandit turns his horse and breaks into a canter. He disappears into a brake of trees, halfway down the hill. There is no hope of catching him.

- If other PCs are fighting the other bandit, *return to stage 1.*
- If the battle is over, and there is a prisoner, *go to stage 8.*
- If the battle is over, and there is no prisoner, *go to "TO FIND A PATH," on page 71.*

This is a good opportunity for interactive role playing: let the players ask questions for the PCs, while you respond for the highwayman. Initially, the bandit(s) will refuse to answer any questions. The thieves expect to be tortured or killed, but they are more frightened of Inledair than of the PCs, and won't give information if tortured. On the other hand, neither Gisulf nor Damah is motivated by loyalty. If offered their freedom in exchange for information, they will talk. Of course, the party may have trouble convincing the bandits that they will actually let them go: consider exactly what the PCs are offering, and how persuasive they are, before you tell all!



Role playing is fun: you can reread the description of the bandit(s) who is being questioned, and suit your answers to fit his personality. Allow the players to get the questions right before you give information; feel free to be surly, or to lie, depending on what you are asked, and how the questions are phrased. If you want, you can use the table below to help formulate your answers.

If you feel shy about role playing, or are anxious to get into the next section, use the table below and the dice to determine what information (if any) to give. Have one player make an influence roll for the party, add the average *Perception bonus* (round up) of the PCs involved in the interrogation, then consult the table. The PCs get all the information up to their die roll (e.g., a total roll of 8 would give the PCs information on the number of bandits and the location of the Keep, but will not give the PCs a sketch of the Keep's layout or any information on the bandits' daily habits).

Influence

Roll	Information Gained
<4	No information
4-6	Number of bandits at keep
7-8	Location of keep
9-10	Rough sketch of keep's layout
11+	Daily procedures followed by bandits, e.g., watches kept, sleeping arrangements, etc.

Under no conditions will the prisoner(s) join the party and help attack the other bandits. In fact, they won't dare to come within Inledair's range, either to help or hinder the party.

• Go to the next sequence, "TO FIND A PATH," on page 71.

"TO FIND A PATH"

I

The PCs should finish any activities that take place at the lookout, including getting their horses, healing or binding wounds, burying bandits, etc. If Damah was killed or captured, the PCs will find 2 silver coins, bearing the imprint of a tree, and 6 copper coins, marked with a ship, in his pockets. Gisulf carried 3 Gondorian (marked with a tree) silver coins, 2 Arnorian silver coins (stamped with three towers), and 4 Gondorian copper coins (bearing the ship imprint).

If you have not already given the party a description of the lookout or the boot prints, read the following:

The bandit's watch-post is in a slight hollow at the top of the hill. Boulders ring the hilltop; these crags help to hide the bandits from passersby. The lookout is nothing more than a small, bare depression, with a pile of logs and a circle of ash and coal, where the bandits sometimes light a fire. Deep boot prints, made after a rain two nights before, lead down the northern slope of the hill. The trail leads northeast, then curves southwest, to enter a cave on the hillside.

If the PCs are going to search the cave, read the following description.

The cave's mouth is partially hidden by a bilberry bush growing just beside the entrance. The opening is six feet wide, and ten tall; the floor of the cave is solid granite. Near the entrance, the floor is smooth, eroded and levelled by rain. The cave walls open up just inside the mouth: the cave is nearly fifty feet deep, thirty feet wide, and twenty feet tall.

Each of the bandits has one horse. If the party attacked the brigands before they dismounted and put their horses into the cave, then they have already caught or lost the horses. The animals were bridled and saddled. If, however, the PCs attacked the bandits after the horses were tied in the cave, there may be horses in the cave.

If both bandits were captured or killed, there are two bridled horses in the cave. If both brigands have escaped, there will be no horses or bridles in the cave; if one bandit escaped, one horse and bridle will remain. Even if the thieves escaped with the horses, they didn't take the time to saddle them; so both saddles will be in the cave. The saddles are in fair condition. The horses, both chestnuts, are good riding animals, but have no special abilities.

The floor of the cave is covered with straw and manure; there is hay and fodder along one wall. Across the cave, large rings have been driven into the wall.

The cave contains no secrets and no treasure.

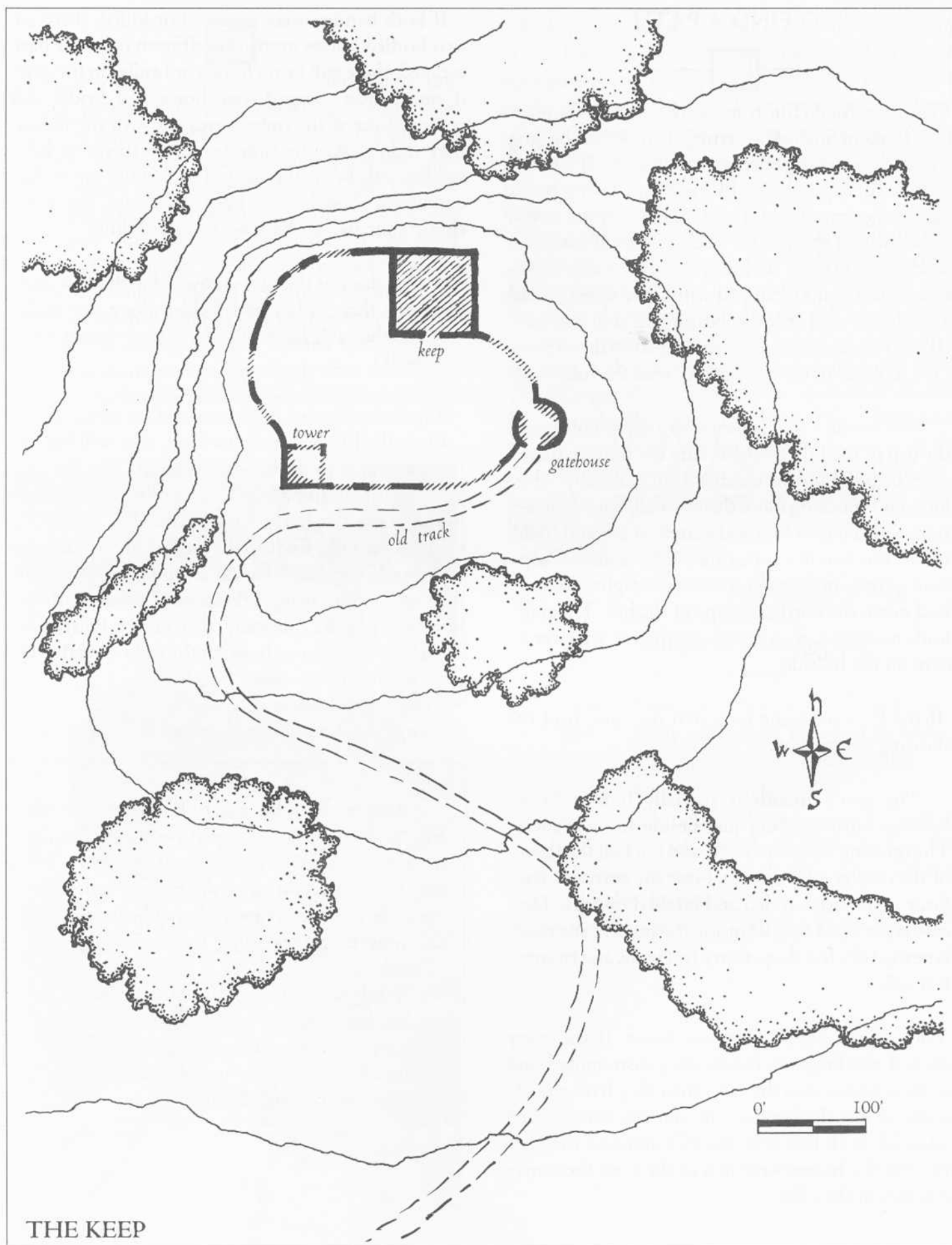
Once the PCs are ready to leave, they will have to find the tracks to the bandits' hideout. The *Perception* maneuver for finding the trail depends on how much information the party has. If the PCs induced a prisoner to talk, finding the trail is an *Perception*Δ6 maneuver. If they saw a bandit escaping on horseback, they will need to make a *Perception*Δ7 maneuver. If they heard the bandits ride away, they need a *Perception*Δ8 maneuver; if they saw or heard nothing, finding the trail is a *Perception*Δ9 maneuver.

- If the party finds tracks, go to stage 3.
- If the party is hopelessly lost, go to stage 2.

GM NOTE

Aragorn is on his way to Rivendell, but has left the East Road to search for a rare healing herb, Bitter Stagberry. The plant should be setting fruit now, and since the healing properties are in the berries, Aragorn felt that he should take the time to gather some for himself and for Elrond.

While seeking the fruit, Aragorn has found the bandits' trail. He is surprised to find a trail made by humans and horses in this country of Trolls. Hoping to discover who made the path, and why, he has turned aside to follow it.



The PCs are searching for a trail, but can't find anything. They have been looking for some time; their own footprints now obscure any signs of the bandits' route.

Have the PCs *roll the dice* and add their *Perception bonuses*. Anyone with a result of 11 or more will see a Man, approaching stealthily. PCs who see the Man may warn the other party members, but no one has time to attack before the Man pops out from behind a hazel and says hello. Those who failed their *Perception maneuvers* will be surprised (unless warned by a more observant colleague), but will quickly recognize the Man, for he is Strider.

Read the following description to the party.

"Well met again!" Aragorn says, with an amused smile. "It's as well I didn't intend to harm you. Have you lost something dear to you, or are you searching for some rare weed?"

What do the players want to do? If they choose to tell Aragorn that they are searching for a trail, he can point it out to them: he picked up the trail in the woods, and has followed it to the PCs. If the PCs ask Strider for help in dealing with the brigands, he will tell them that he is expected in Rivendell, and can't join the party.

Aragorn has been seeking a healing berry, called Bitter Stagberry, as he walked, and has gathered a fair supply. If any PCs are gravely injured, Aragorn will heal them before he leaves. If the PCs are in good shape, Aragorn will give a dozen Bitter Stagberries to Tatharína (or another party member, if Tatharína is not present). When eaten, each berry will heal 4-24 points of damage (roll 2d6 twice).

• *Go to stage 4.*

The PCs have picked up the trail, and started down it.

Have the players *roll the dice* and add their *Perception bonuses*. Any PC who has an 11 or higher will see a Man moving stealthily towards them. They can warn the party, but will have no time to draw weapons before the Man pops out in front of them. PCs who failed their *Perception maneuvers* will be surprised (unless they were warned by another PC), but everyone recognizes the Man. It's Strider!

Read the following description.

"Well met again!" Aragorn says, as he appears from behind a hazel. "We seem to be following the same trail, although in opposite directions. Can you tell me where it leads?"

Aragorn picked up the trail in the woods, so he doesn't know what the Keep is like; he hasn't seen any bandits. Although he cannot turn aside from his business to help the PCs fight the brigands, he will stay to heal any PCs who are injured. Aragorn has been gathering healing berries, and will give a dozen Bitter Stagberries to the party. Each berry, if ingested, will cure 4-24 points of Damage (roll 2d6 twice).

• *Go to stage 4.*

The PCs will need to *roll the dice* one more time while following the trail, to be sure that they don't get lost. Add their *General bonuses*. If all the PCs have results less than 6, they have lost the trail. If any PC gets a 6 or higher, he or she can point the trail out to the others.

Without getting lost, it will take the PCs twenty minutes to walk to the hideout. If the PCs do get lost, they can search for the trail. They should roll dice and add their *Perception bonuses*. If anyone gets a 9 or higher, that PC has found the trail. If everyone gets below a 9, the PCs will have to keep searching. For each roll, add another hour's search to the game time. The PCs can keep searching until they find the path or it gets dark.



If it gets too dark to search, the PCs should wait until morning. At sunrise, they can resume their search until they find the trail.

When the PCs are on the trail, read the following description. Show the players the map on page 59, so they can trace their path.

Shortly beyond the cave where the horses are kept, the trail enters a grove of trees. The trees are mixed hardwood: mostly beech and birch, with some hazel and oak. Branches are not dense and underbrush is sparse; so travelling through the wood is easy. Following the trail, however, is a bit difficult: a thick layer of leaves and detritus covers the ground, and obscures prints.

Once you are clear of the trees, the path is easier to follow. The trail leads generally northeast; the ground is mostly grassy, and where the bandits ride, the grass is flattened. The path goes downhill for nearly two hundred feet before you leave the hill. There are several groves of ancient pines alongside the trail, but the path cuts across open land.

The trail curves between hills, but the ground is nowhere level. At intervals, the ground is rocky and bare of vegetation, making the trail more difficult to descry. Even where the land is grassy, there are rocks and boulders tumbled in the grass. Hazel and bilberry brush grow in the meadow; occasionally, the darker green of holly can be seen.

The fields are busy with birds and insects, but in spite of their cheerful racket, the land seems austere and cruel. This is no homely Bree meadow, but a wilderness home of Trolls, wolves, and bandits.

For completing SCENE 3, each PC should receive 160 experience points. Give them 20 more points if they captured one bandit, 40 points if they captured both.

• *Proceed to the Scene 4, "HOLD AMONG THE HILLS."*



roc was sitting in the common room, idly tossing dice, his left hand pitted against his right. Beside him, Damah was carefully slicing bread and cheese.

"Mind you be careful with that knife, Damah," Broc said.

"Damah's fine," Maisi crooned, as she came into the room. She smiled at Damah, nearly causing the hapless youth to slice off a finger.

Maisi turned to Broc. "Dicing, Broc? Wouldn't you be better off practicing your parries? I noticed you were looking a little rusty last week, when you were fighting with that merchant. Or were you dancing?"

Broc smiled back at her. "Not all of us have your dedication, Maisi," he said. 'I'll kill her,' he thought, 'I really will. If only I could catch her off guard...but Maisi never moves without those daggers...'

Bruad came in, bearing a large cauldron of stew. "Dinner," he said succinctly, dropping the pot on the table. Inledair, following Bruad, seated himself across from Broc.

"Here we are," he smiled, "together in our snug home. Isn't this cosy?"

• FIVE •

SCENE 4: "HOLD AMONG THE HILLS"

Scene 4 contains four *sequences*.

The PCs scout the bandits' hideout in "TO LOOK AHEAD."

In "A BUNDLE OF NEWS," the PCs compare notes on their scouting trips, and plan their attack.

The party attacks the highwaymen in "SLASH THEM! BEAT THEM!"

Finally, they search the Keep for treasure in "THERE IS NOTHING LIKE LOOKING." The rewards should be worth the struggle.

"TO LOOK AHEAD"



When the party is within sight of the Keep, read the following description:

The bandits' trail starts to climb gradually; it soon joins an ancient, cobbled lane. To the south, the road is so overgrown that it disappears into the meadow. To the north, the lane curves past a stand of pine trees. If you look up the lane past the trees, you can see a walled castle on a hilltop. Although it is nearly 300 yards away, the Keep is already an impressive structure.

To keep out of sight, the PCs will probably want to leave the lane and cut through the woods. Once they are through the trees (but hopefully still hiding behind one), read the following:

The wall around the Keep is crumbling. In places, the bulwark is fifteen feet tall, but much of it is breached. Grey stones litter the ground. Weeds have forced their way through the stones, and a thick mass of honeysuckle clings to a portion of the southeastern wall.

For the most part, the wall is curved, presumably to encircle the main castle. In the southwestern corner there is a square tower. The tower's walls are taller than the rest of the bulwark, and the roof is battlemented. The road curves beneath the tower, then parallels the wall; it disappears behind the wall's southeast corner.

Hopefully, the PCs have chosen to sneak up on the Keep, hiding behind trees rather than marching up the road.

- If they choose to approach the hideout openly and noisily, or to attack without scouting, go to "SLASH THEM! BEAT THEM!" on page 82.
- If the PCs approach the Keep stealthily and scout, go to stage 2.

GM NOTE

To gain more information about the Keep and the bandits, some of the PCs should scout the castle. Scouting should help them plan an attack. If they chose to rush in without looking about, you will have to read through this section so that you can give them the basic information as they attack; just don't give them any details.

Each PC who is scouting the Keep should make two die rolls. Add the PC's *Perception* bonus to the first roll; the *Subterfuge* bonus to the second. You should record each PC's results, as they will be used throughout the next action sequence.

2

Depending on what has happened, the highwaymen may be alert to the possibility of an attack. They will be alert if either of the following conditions are met:

1. A bandit has escaped from the lookout, after either seeing, or fighting with, the PCs.
2. Night has come and Gisulf or Damah has not returned.

Although the brigands will be worried if Gisulf and Damah don't return, they won't go looking for them. Their main concern is protecting themselves: they won't walk into a possible trap, but will stay in the Keep, in defensive positions.

If the ruffians become concerned, they will remain on alert for 24 hours before assuming that the threat has passed. They will then resume their normal activities.

- If the bandits are alert, go to stage 3.
- If the bandits are not alert, and it is day, go to stage 4.
- The PCs may spend more than a day scouting the Keep; but the bandits will remain alert for only 24 hours. If the PCs wait long enough, they may attack at night, when the bandits are not alert. If the bandits are not alert, and it is night, go to stage 5.

3

The bandits are alert and on watch. Broc is on the Tower wall facing west. Bruad, too, is on the Tower wall; he is looking south. Athaulf is in the upper level of the Gatehouse, gazing east. Maisi, Acair and Inledair are in the Keep. Maisi is on the balcony (Room 4), overlooking the Great Hall; Acair is in the Great Hall (Room 1), standing near the entrance. He is looking out, into the courtyard. Inledair is in the doorway to the kitchen (Room 2).

If either Damah or Gisulf (or both) escaped from the watch-post, they are downstairs in the bandits' common room (Room 6).

As the PCs scout the hideout, they may catch sight of the bandits on watch. Of course, the thieves may see the PCs, too. Use the map on page 72, and counters or figures for the characters, and trace the PCs' movements. If a character has a clear line of sight to a bandit, use that PC's *Perception* maneuver (see the GM Note on page 76) and consult the table below. If a brigand is looking toward a PC, use the PC's *Subterfuge* maneuver (from stage 1) and consult the table. Remember that each bandit is gazing in one direction only, and will have no opportunity to spot a PC behind him. Thus, if Tolman approaches the Tower from the north, he may see Broc and Bruad, but since Broc is facing west and Bruad south, neither ruffian will see Tolman. The brigands aren't deaf, though; if Tolman shouts hello, they'll notice.

Bandit	Perception (to see bandit)	Subterfuge (to stay undetected)
Broc	12	11
Bruad	7	11
Athaulf	9	11
Acair	10	11

If a bandit does see a PC, he will warn the others. The sentinels will retreat to the Keep's Great Hall (Room 1); all of the bandits will await an attack in the Great Hall, in the positions detailed in stage 5 of "SLASH THEM! BEAT THEM!", page 82. The brigands will be alert and ready for battle.

As the PCs move along their scouting paths, read them the descriptions of what they see. Along with these descriptions, tell the PCs if they see any bandits. After making their observations, the players should be allowed to adjust their plans. For example, if Lily is approaching from the west and sees Broc on the Tower wall, she may decide to take a more northerly approach to avoid being seen by him.

• Go to stage 6.

4

During the day, the bandits rely on their sentinels at the lookout to warn them of danger or potential targets, so they do not keep any watch at the Keep. Since the brigands are not aware of a threat, no one will be prepared for visitors. There is a 50% chance (1-3 on one d6) that Broc will be tending the horses in the Great Hall (Room 1). If he's not in the Great Hall, he will be in the basement of the Keep, with the other cut-throats.

Outside the castle walls, PCs with a *Subterfuge* maneuver (see stage 1) of 3 or greater will not alert the bandits. If Broc is in the Great Hall, any PCs in the Bailey need a result of 8 or higher to remain undetected. If Broc is in the cellar, a PC in the Bailey will need a *Subterfuge* maneuver of 6 or greater to be unnoticed. If any PC alerts the brigands, they will take the defensive positions detailed in stage 5 of "SLASH THEM! BEAT THEM!", page 82, and await an attack.

• Go to stage 6.

5

The bandits believe that the threat has passed, and are no longer alert. However, at night they post guards at the Keep. Currently, Athaulf is on top of the Tower, and Bruad is in the Keep's Great Hall (Room 1).

The PCs are moving under cover of darkness: remember to add nighttime modifications to *Subterfuge* (+2) and *Perception* (-2 for Men or Hobbits; -1 for Elves, Half-elves or Dwarves) rolls made in stage 1. Outside the castle walls, a PC with a *Subterfuge* maneuver of 4 or greater will not alert the bandits. PCs in the Bailey need a 6 or higher to remain undetected.

If the bandits are alerted, they will go to the Keep's Great Hall (Room 1), and take positions detailed in stage 5 of "SLASH THEM! BEAT THEM!", page 82. There they will await an attack.

• Go to stage 6.

While the PCs are scouting the Keep, they should move their counters along the map. As they move, read a description of what the PCs see. After each description, return to stage 6, until all descriptions have been read, or the PCs have finished scouting.

Any PC who is scouting the Keep can hear the appropriate description of the approach from the north, south, east or west. Read the description of the Bailey to any PCs who are within the wall, or standing at a gap in the wall and looking into the courtyard. The description of the Great Hall (Room 1) should only be read to those PCs whose *Perception* maneuver in stage 1 was 7 or higher, and who pass within sight of the entrance by day (at night, the PC must be within 80' of the entrance). Descriptions of the Tower or Gatehouse can be read to any PC who is within five feet of the buildings, and can see into them.

- For a description of the Keep from the north, go to stage 7.
- For a description of the Keep from the south, go to stage 8.
- For a description of the Keep from the east, go to stage 9.
- For a description of the Keep from the west, go to stage 10.
- For a description of the Bailey, go to stage 11.
- For a description of the Tower, go to stage 12.
- For a description of the Gatehouse, go to stage 13.
- For a description of the Keep's roof (Room 5), go to stage 14.
- For a description of the view through the entrance of the Keep's Great Hall (Room 1), go to stage 15.
- Once the PCs have finished scouting the Keep, go to "A BUNDLE OF NEWS," on page 82.

GM NOTE

Unless the PCs are all scouting in a group, they will "see" different things. They will probably report back to the party, so if you want to simplify things, you may want to read the descriptions to all the players. But if you want to be more realistic, read the descriptions only to the players whose PCs "see" them, and have them report to the other players after they're together again.

From the north, the ascent to the Keep is steep. Grey and weathered, the fortress wall crowns the hill. On the west, the bulwark is curved and broken, but the central section is still intact. Where the wall is undamaged, it is 15' tall.

On the east squats the massive, square structure of the Keep itself. Near the ground, the building is solid; the ancient stonework was well-crafted, and offers neither hand- nor foothold. Eleven feet above the ground, its walls are pierced by arrow slits. The cross-shaped openings are five feet apart; the horizontal and vertical slits are 2' by 4". The wall of the building is intact for another 5' above the arrow slits; but the upper portions are crumbling. In places, the ruin is 25' tall, but many holes gape in the topmost edge. With its jagged crown, the building looks like some huge, fell Troll.

- Return to stage 6.

GM NOTE

Climbing the building to the roof (Room 5) is a *General*ΔII maneuver. A PC with a result of 1 may twist an ankle; but most climbers won't be harmed by a fall. It is much easier to climb the bulwark first, then climb from the wall to the building's roof. Climbing the bulwark, then scaling the building, is a *General*Δ9 maneuver.

The road to the Keep arcs first northwest, then northeast. After passing under the square tower in the southwestern corner, the lane marches within 20' of the wall as it leads east. It disappears from view around the southeast corner of the bulwark.

The southern part of the bulwark is badly decayed. There are 2- to 5-foot gaps where the wall is completely missing. The Keep itself is in better shape: its southern wall seems intact, and still bears its ancient battlements.

- Return to stage 6.

From the east, you can see a round tower — the Gatehouse — protruding from the wall. On either side of the Gatehouse, the wall is intact; the building, too, seems undamaged. It is windowless, 20' tall, and sports a battlemented roof. The road to the fortress enters through an arch in the southern wall. The doorway is 10' wide and 8' tall. Great iron hinges hang beside the opening, but the gates are gone.

To the north of the Gatehouse, the bulwark is unbroken for 18'. Beyond that span, the wall is crumbling. In places, all that remains are piles of stone. The northernmost section, however, is still strong. It is straight, and taller than the other structures, and appears to be one wall of a large building — the Keep proper.

Although its crown has deep rifts, the building's lower portions are solid. The wall rises, smooth and unbroken, for 11'. Above the 11' mark, the wall is pierced by arrow slits. The openings are cross-shaped; each horizontal and vertical slit is 2' by 4". Above the crosses, the stonework is good for at least another four feet. Sections of the wall rise 24' above the ground, but most of the upper edges are decaying, and bear deep fissures.

If any PC wishes to climb to the roof of the building, see the GM Note on page 78.

• *Return to stage 6.*

The ascent to the fortress is steep. The top of the hill is encircled by a stone wall. Much of the bulwark is standing; but it is breached in places. At the southern end of the wall, there is a square tower. The western wall of the tower is intact. It is twenty feet tall, and battlemented. You can see the tower's northern wall inside the bulwark: it is crumbling. Many stones are missing altogether, and the battlements are gone.

• *Return to stage 6.*

The Keep's bulwark is roughly egg-shaped. It encloses an area that is 260' by 240' at its widest points. The area inside the wall is choked with weeds and debris. Thorns and thistles compete for space in the old walled gardens; grass pushes between the stones that once paved a road to the main building. A crow is preening itself on top of a decaying well.

In the eastern part of the Bailey, there is a circular tower — the Gatehouse. To the southwest, there is a small, square tower. Both buildings are stone, and badly damaged. In the northeast corner stands a massive, square structure — the Keep proper. It, too, is made of stone; each of its walls is 80' long. The western one is solid near the ground, but the upper stonework is collapsing. The southern wall has a large entryway, but no door. Near the top of the doorway, the opening has been enlarged by decay. A hole gapes from the doorway all the way up through the roof.

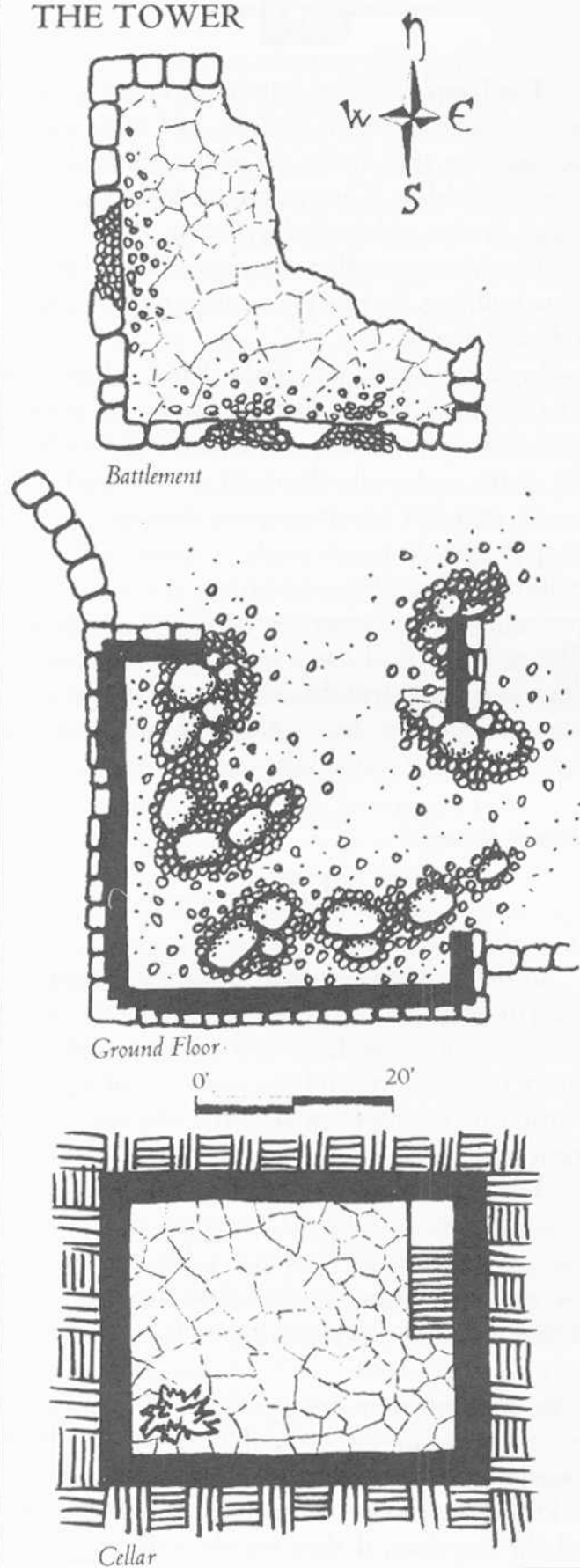
• *Return to stage 6.*

In the southwest corner of the wall stand the ruins of a square tower. Like the other buildings, it was made of stone. Its south and west walls are intact, but the north and east walls are damaged. A portion of the roof remains; the original battlements still rise above the south and west walls.

The tower has only one story intact. A single, large chamber, 40' by 40', occupies the interior. Parts of its flagstone floor are visible, but most of the surface is buried under rubble from the collapsed roof and disintegrating walls.

This building once housed the castle guards. The barracks were in the ground floor room. Buried beneath the debris on the floor, there is a trapdoor. If the PCs choose to sift through the rubble, they will find the trapdoor; if they merely walk around the building and look, finding the door is a *Perception* Δ13 maneuver.

THE TOWER



If the PCs find the trapdoor, either while scouting or later, read the following:

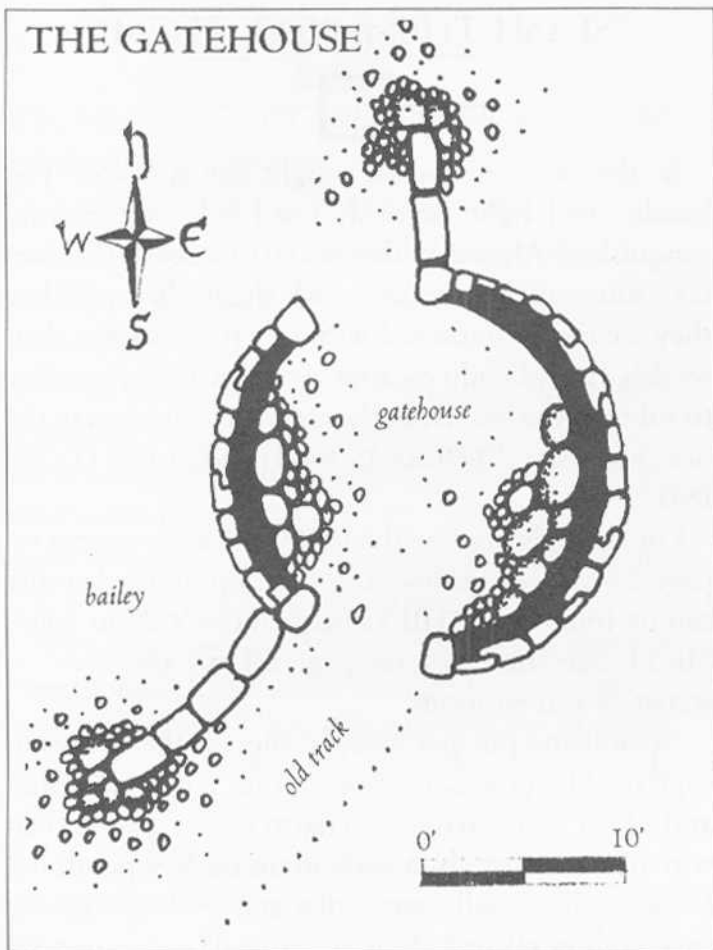
The trapdoor lifts easily, and reveals a very steep stairway. Although the stairs are old, they are still reasonably sound. The basement below is extremely dark; Men or Hobbits will need a light in order to see anything.

In the cellar, a wooden rack hangs from the north wall. The rack is rotting and in places broken, but still holds two swords. One of the blades is rusted through; the other needs cleaning, but looks salvageable. A moldy leather quiver still hangs from a peg in the south wall; the arrows have fallen through the bottom and lie on the floor. The arrows are all badly damaged. In the corner near the arrows lies a pile of decaying material. Atop the pile, a very large rat is calmly watching you. No other rats are visible, but the floor is littered with evidence of their presence.

The arrows are truly worthless; the pile of rags is nothing more than a pile of rags. The only valuable item in the cellar is the cleaner of the two swords. Dwarf-made, the sword gives its bearer a +1 *Melee OB*. In addition, the sword will vibrate if there are Orcs within 500 feet. The vibration causes a low-pitched thrum. If the Orcs move closer, the sound and the vibration become more intense; if they move away, both sound and vibration become quieter. The sword's vibrations cause the user to lose the +1 *Melee OB* normally provided, but the noise distracts opponents, thus increasing the bearer's *Defense bonus* by +2. After an owner has used the sword for a short time (for example, twice in combat or practice), the hilt will mold itself to the owner's grasp.

• *Return to stage 6.*

THE GATEHOUSE



13

The road to the Keep ends in a round, stone tower. The building's diameter is 22 feet. It has two entrances: one in the southeast wall that leads to the outside, and one in the north that leads to the Bailey. Both entries are permanently open; although there are hinges in each door frame, there are no gates. Most of the roof, too, is gone. The floor is the only part of the tower in good repair: it is made of flagstones, and free from clutter.

The building, the Keep's Gatehouse, was one of the castle's defenses. Originally, the Gatehouse was a two-story structure, though there is now nothing left of the second story. It was reached by ladders to a trapdoor. Once the Gatehouse had large, barred double doors. In addition, each entry had an iron portcullis. Each portcullis dropped close behind the doors, and acted as bars to keep the doors closed. The mechanism for raising and lowering the grilles was on the second floor.

• *Return to stage 6.*

14

Crumbling sections of walls, both exterior and interior, indicate that the roof was once the floor of a second story. The walls are so ruined, and the roof so buried in rubble, that it is impossible to guess the original layout of the second floor. A hole gapes in the southern section of the roof, above the Keep's entrance; there is another cleft in the north-east corner. This opening is rectangular: a flight of stairs descends from the portal. The stairs, like the roof above, are blocked by rocks and crumbling mortar. A Hobbit can easily find a path down the stairs; but Dwarves will find the stairway difficult, and Elves and Men can only descend by first clearing a path.

If the PC(s) wish to go downstairs, they will find themselves on the balcony (*Room 4*). If they choose to continue down the stairs into the Keep, read them the description of the Great Hall (*Room 1*), and any other rooms they choose to search, from "THERE IS NOTHING LIKE LOOKING" on page 86. If they encounter any bandits, go to "SLASH THEM! BEAT THEM!" on page 82.

• *To continue scouting, return to stage 6.*

15

Above the entrance, part of the Keep's roof is missing. The hole in the roof extends down twenty feet at its deepest point; and is fifty feet wide. On either side of the entrance, the wall has partially collapsed. There is no longer any door; the bottom of the door frame remains, but the top has rotted away.

Beyond the doorway, you can see a large hall. The hall is apparently as wide as the building; the ceiling is tall, probably fifteen feet or more. Horses are stabled within. You can see four, but there may be more.

• *Return to stage 6.*

"A BUNDLE OF NEWS"

The PCs should share the observations they made during the scouting trip, and use the information to create a plan for attacking the Keep. The details available to the party depend on what happened earlier in the adventure (for example, did they gain information from a captive bandit, and how much did they learn while scouting?). There are some basic things that any party should consider, such as:

1. Are the bandits alert?
2. Should the party attempt a sneak attack, or a direct assault?
3. Should the attack come from one direction, or should the party split up and attack from several directions at once?
4. Should the PCs attack during the day or at night?

In case things go ill, the PCs may want to make retreat plans. They should probably at least consider how to cope with an injured fighter (for example, the fighter could retreat if wounded; or call for help). The party may also review any spells they know, and consider how best to use them.

Give the PCs from 3-15 EPs for each clever idea they come up with.

When the PCs have finished their plans, go to the next *action sequence*, "SLASH THEM! BEAT THEM!"

"SLASH THEM! BEAT THEM!"

I

In this section, the PCs fight the ruffians. The bandits will fight viciously until half of them are vanquished. After that, they will try to flee. If they can take some of their bounty with them, they will; but they are more concerned with self-preservation than wealth. If any bandit escapes with treasure, remember to subtract the loot from the room descriptions in the next sequence, "THERE IS NOTHING LIKE LOOKING."

For the fighting, use the *COMBAT action sequence* on page 25 of *The Guidelines*. Information on the bandits can be found in "THIEVING RUFFIANS," on pages 50-53. See the chart on page 54 for the bandits' statistics and weapons.

Athaulf and Inledair would rather die than be taken captive. The others, if trapped, may surrender. Broc and Maisi may attempt to charm their captors, then win their freedom (by a knife in the back, if possible). Damah will actually surrender, and give up thievery forever. Broc, Bruad, Acair and Gisulf will surrender as a last resort, but continue to look for an opportunity to escape. Of course, any bandit can be captured if he or she is knocked unconscious, then tied up.

As the PCs enter a room in the Keep for the first time, read them a minimal room description. Room descriptions can be found in "THERE IS NOTHING LIKE LOOKING," pages 86-92. The first highlighted section for each room is a brief description. To this description you should add any bandits in the room. Don't give any other information unless a PC is searching a room. If someone searches during the battle, remember that only part of a room can be searched in one round.

- If the PCs were seen while approaching the Keep or during the scouting trip, go to stage 5.
- If the PCs were not seen, but the bandits are alert, go to stage 2.
- If the bandits are not alert, and it is day, go to stage 3.
- If the bandits are not alert, and it is night, go to stage 4.

The bandits are alert and on watch, having taken the following positions:

Broc is on the Tower wall, looking west.

Bruad is also on the Tower wall, facing south.

Athaulf is on the second level of the Gatehouse, watching east.

Acair is in the Great Hall (Room 1) near the Keep's entrance, watching the Bailey.

Maisi is on the balcony (Room 4), looking down at the Great Hall (Room 1).

Inledair is in the doorway between the Great Hall (Room 1) and the kitchen (Room 2).

If either *Gisulf* or *Damah* escaped from the battle at the lookout, they are in the Bandit common room (Room 6). They will run upstairs and into the Great Hall (Room 1) when they hear sounds of battle, or when another bandit calls them.

If the party is attempting to sneak up on the ruffians, they will need to make a *Subterfuge* ΔII maneuver. If everyone has a result of II or higher, the PCs will surprise the bandits. The party can take one round of action (spells, missile attack, etc.) before a surprised thief can react. The ruffians will react by screaming to alert the others. Bandits in the Keep will fight; bandits in the Tower or Gatehouse will fight if necessary, but would prefer to retreat to the Keep.

If the Tower is attacked first, *Athaulf* will join the fight as soon as he can get there (roll for his movement); but if *Athaulf* is attacked, *Broc* and *Bruad* will retreat to the Keep and take positions in the Great Hall (Room 1) with *Acair*.

If the PCs either fail their *Subterfuge* maneuver, or don't try to sneak, a bandit will see them coming and sound an alarm. Those bandits posted outside will retreat to the Great Hall (Room 1) and make a stand in the doorway to the Keep. If necessary, they will retreat to the kitchen (Room 2). If they can, they will stand in the doorway to fight. They won't retreat beyond the kitchen, since there is no escape from the basement.

Maisi will stay on the balcony (Room 4) and throw daggers. If the battle turns against the bandits, she will escape to the roof (Room 5). She will need one round to move the rocks blocking the stairs. From the roof, *Maisi* will climb down the Keep's wall to escape.

If *Acair* retreats, he will follow *Maisi* up the stairs to the balcony, and then to the roof (Room 5). *Acair* will defend the stairs while *Maisi* clears them. Although *Acair* will try to protect *Maisi* (at least briefly), she will only help him from a safe distance. If *Maisi* is killed, *Acair* will flee to the roof without her; he, too, will need one round to clear the stairs.

Inledair will flee to his room (Room 10) if the bandits are losing the fight. He will take the money from his chest and return to the kitchen. Running to his room, getting the money, and returning to the kitchen will take four rounds. From the kitchen, *Inledair* will then try to escape from the Keep, preferably on horseback. If necessary, he will sacrifice any other bandits in his bid for freedom.

Other bandits will escape however they can, with or without money. Except for *Acair* and *Maisi*, no fleeing brigand will try to help another.

- If the PCs win the battle, go to the next sequence, "THERE IS NOTHING LIKE LOOKING".
- If all the PCs are unconscious or killed, go to stage 7.

The bandits are not alert. Outside the Bailey, sneaking up on the bandits is an *Subterfuge* $\Delta 4$ maneuver; sneaking is an *Subterfuge* $\Delta 6$ maneuver inside the Bailey. Sneaking through the Great Hall, the kitchen and down the stairs to the Bandit common room is a *Subterfuge* $\Delta 10$ maneuver. If the party does manage to sneak down the stairs, they can get one round of magic or missile attack before the ruffians can defend themselves.

If any PC fails the *Subterfuge* maneuver in the Bailey, the Hall, the kitchen, the office, or on the balcony, the horses will whinny. *Broc* will come upstairs to check the animals; if he sees any PCs, he will retreat to the kitchen (Room 2), screaming for help. If a PC fails the *Subterfuge* maneuver anywhere else in the Keep, a bandit will see that PC and combat will begin.

Broc and *Bruad* are playing cards in the common room (Room 6). Both have weapons nearby. If they must flee, neither will try to save anyone else; but either will grab for the candelabra on the table if it is within reach as they escape.

Inledair is in his room (Room 10), resting or plotting. As soon as a bandit calls an alarm, he will grab his sword and join the fight. If the fight starts going



against the brigands, Inledair will take the money from the chest in his room (if the fight is upstairs); or just grab the candelabra from his table (if battle has reached the basement), and flee, by horseback if possible. Inledair will sacrifice any other bandits in his attempt to escape.

Like Inledair, Acair and Maisi will be in their room (Room 11) until an alarm is given. Both will come forth ready for combat: Acair with his mace in hand, Maisi with a throwing dagger in one hand and a sword in the other. Maisi, who always carries four daggers, will pick up a fifth as she leaves her room. Her sixth dagger is on the table in her room.

Maisi will throw daggers for as long as she can before entering a melee. If the battle turns against them, Acair and Maisi will try to escape together, sacrificing anyone except each other. Acair will pause (at least briefly) to try to save Maisi, but Maisi won't return the favor unless she can help from a distance with her daggers. If either Acair or Maisi is killed, the other will flee.

Athaulf is resting in the Sleeping Room (Room 7). He needs one round to wake up and get his sword. Since Athaulf loves to fight, he will join the battle as quickly as possible, and fight for as long as he can before fleeing. If Damah and/or Gisulf escaped from the lookout, they will be with Athaulf. They, too, will join the battle quickly; but they will be quicker to flee than Athaulf will.

- If the PCs win the battle, go to the next activity sequence, "THERE IS NOTHING LIKE LOOKING".
- If all the PCs are unconscious or killed, go to stage 7.

The bandits are not alert, but at night they post sentinels. Sneaking up on the sentinels is an *Subterfuge* Δ4 maneuver outside the Bailey, and an *Subterfuge* Δ6 maneuver within the wall. If the party surprises a bandit on watch, they can attack for one round before the cut-throat can defend himself. Although the party can surprise Bruad (in the Great Hall), they cannot get past him to the kitchen without alerting him.

Bruad is stationed in the Keep's Great Hall (Room 1), within ten feet of the entrance. He keeps his battle-axe nearby at all times. Unless the party successfully sneaks up on him, or he is caught dozing (1 in 6 chance; roll when the first PC reaches the Keep's doorway), he is ready for action.

Athaulf is on the Tower wall. If he sees the party coming he will sound the alarm, either by leaving his post and telling Bruad (in the Great Hall) or, if the party is already upon him, by screaming for help. Athaulf has his sword and shield and is, as ever, eager to fight.

If Athaulf yells a warning, or comes to warn Bruad, Bruad will go to the head of the basement stairs and yell down to wake the other brigands. If he has time, he will then return to his post in the Great Hall.

If Bruad is attacked before being warned by Athaulf, he will try to reach the kitchen (Room 2), yelling as he goes in order to alert the bandits sleeping below. Once he reaches the kitchen, he will attempt to hold the door against the intruders. If Athaulf is alive, he will join the fray as soon as he can after Bruad starts yelling.

All the other bandits are asleep. Inledair is in his chamber (Room 10), Acair and Maisi are in theirs (Room 11), and the others are in the general sleeping quarters (Room 7). The sleeping thieves will need two rounds to wake up and get their weapons, after which they will move upstairs to the Great Hall, or wherever the combat is taking place.

- If the sleeping bandits have at least four rounds between the time they wake, and the time when the party reaches the Keep, go to stage 5.
- If the battle reaches the Keep before four rounds have elapsed, go to stage 6.

If the PCs were seen during their scouting trip, or if the bandits become alarmed when the party begins to attack, the brigands will take up the following positions:

Acair will go to the balcony (Room 4), overlooking the Great Hall (Room 1), between *Maisi* and the stairs leading down.

Maisi will go to the balcony (Room 4), and stand near the stairs to the roof (Room 5).

Inledair will go to the doorway of the kitchen (Room 2).

Athaulf (if he escaped from the Tower) will go to the eastern side of the Keep's Great Hall (Room 1), near the entrance.

Bruad will go to the western side of the Great Hall (Room 1), near the entrance.

Broc (and *Damah* and *Gisulf*, if they are alive) will be in the Great Hall (Room 1) between the kitchen (Room 2) and the entrance.

If the bandits are losing, they will attempt to flee. *Acair* and *Maisi* will flee to the roof (Room 5). They will need one round to clear enough rocks from the stairs to get to the roof; if necessary, *Acair* will defend the balcony (Room 4) while *Maisi* clears the stairs. *Acair* will attempt to protect *Maisi* (at least briefly), but she will only help him from a safe distance. If either *Acair* or *Maisi* is killed, the other will retreat.

Inledair, too, will flee if the battle turns against the brigands. He will try to run to his room (Room 10) and take the money from his chest before escaping. *Inledair* will require four rounds to get the money and reach the kitchen (Room 2). If possible, he will escape on horseback; he will sacrifice any other bandit in his way.

The other bandits will escape however they can. They will take any treasure within easy reach, and won't pause to help each other.

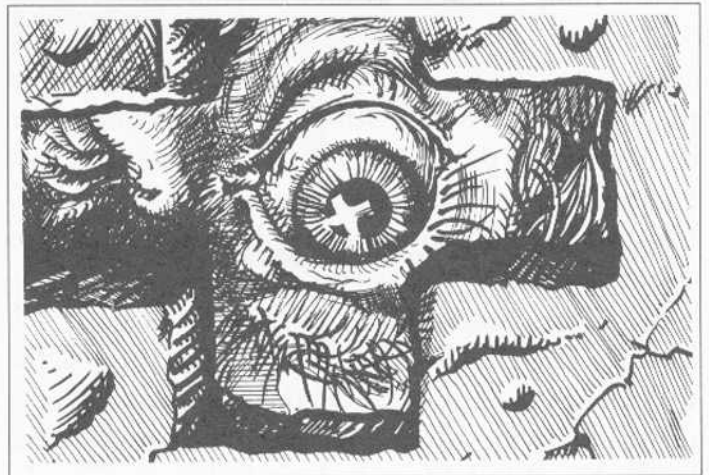
- If the party has vanquished the bandits, go to the next sequence, "THERE IS NOTHING LIKE LOOKING."
- If all the PCs are unconscious or killed, go to stage 7.

The bandits will move toward the Great Hall (Room 1) of the Keep. Sleeping brigands will need one round to wake up and one round to arm themselves; use their movement and the time elapsed to determine where the battle (or battles) takes place.

If the battle turns against the bandits, any thief who is capable of escaping will run. *Acair* will protect *Maisi*, if he can; she will only help him from a safe distance, by throwing daggers. While *Acair* and *Maisi* will not sacrifice each other, they will sacrifice any other brigand in their bids for freedom. The other bandits will not make any attempt to help each other in a rout.

If *Inledair* can escape, he will try to get the money out of his chest and flee, preferably on horseback. If he can't get his money, he will run without it. Getting the money out of the chest and running to the kitchen will take four rounds. Other bandits will take anything within reach before fleeing.

- If the PCs vanquish the brigands, go to the next sequence, "THERE IS NOTHING LIKE LOOKING."
- If all the PCs are unconscious or killed, go to stage 7.



After leaving the party on the bandit trail, Aragorn went to meet Halbarad by the Last Bridge. Aragorn was growing increasingly uneasy about the valiant group he had left, so he sent Halbarad on to Rivendell to explain his delay to Elrond, while he went back to the bandits' watch-post. Aragorn picked up the bandits' trail and followed it to the Keep; he arrived just as the last PC lost consciousness.

"Elendil!" he cried, "Aiya Eärendil Elenion Ancalima!"

Seeing Aragorn in his wrath, the bandits were terrified. They believed that Aragorn was some warrior-king, probably leading a host of seasoned soldiers. Dropping their weapons, the ruffians fled.

Read the following:

When you wake up, you can see Aragorn sitting before a small pot; steam is rising from the vessel. There is a wholesome smell of mint, and an herb garden in midsummer.

Seeing your open eyes, Aragorn smiles.

"A brave fight, but it is well that I returned! Now I hope I can be assured of your safety."

If it is late afternoon or evening, Aragorn will spend the night in the Keep with the PCs. He will advise them to stay in the Sleeping Room (*Room 7*) and post a guard, but the bandits won't return. Aragorn will set out for Elrond's house at dawn, leaving the party to search the Keep.

If it is morning or early afternoon, Aragorn will leave for Rivendell as soon as the PCs are healed. He will advise the party to search the Keep, but will urge them not to be slow about it, since some of the brigands still live. He will also tell them to take the road to Rivendell in easy stages, and to rest frequently.

• *Go to the next sequence, "THERE IS NOTHING LIKE LOOKING."*

"THERE IS NOTHING LIKE LOOKING"

This section contains a description of the bandits' hideout. Rooms are listed in numerical order; the numbers are from the map of the Keep's interior on page 87.

The bandits' hideout is located in an old Keep. The building once had three stories, with a battlemented roof. The cellars, ground floor and balcony remain; most of the third story is gone. The original roof is entirely missing; the third-story floor is now the roof of the hideout.

For a description of the Keep's exterior and its outbuildings, see "TO LOOK AHEAD," on page 75.

When the PCs have finished searching the Keep, go to the Scene 5, "ALL OVER, AND WELL OVER."

GM NOTE

After the battle is over, the PCs should spend some time carefully searching the Keep. One or more PCs can search a room. Every PC should make a *Perception maneuver* for each room he or she searches.

Of course, they'll probably need to spend some time healing their wounds first.

GM NOTE

When the PCs have finished searching the Keep, note down *experience points* for Scene 4. Each PC should receive 200 points, plus any Idea points from "A BUNDLE OF NEWS." You may also want to give additional points to any PCs who showed exceptional prowess in scouting, fighting, spell-casting, etc.

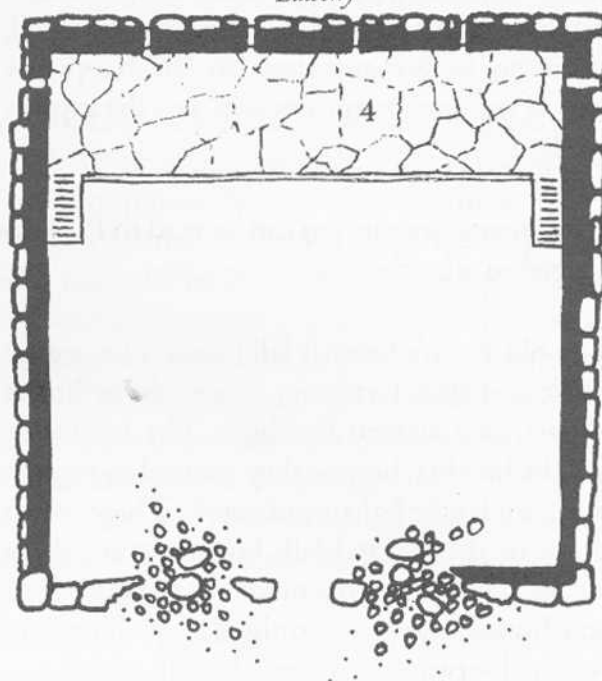
The following description should be read to the PCs when they first see the Keep's entrance and Great Hall (*Room 1*). It can be read to PCs engaged in combat.

THE KEEP

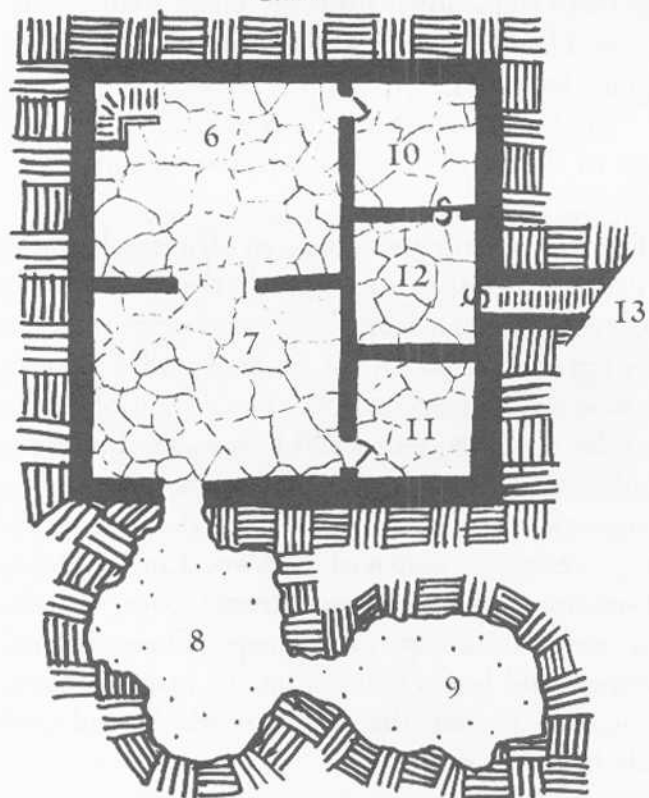
Roof



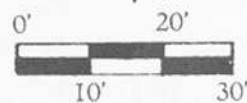
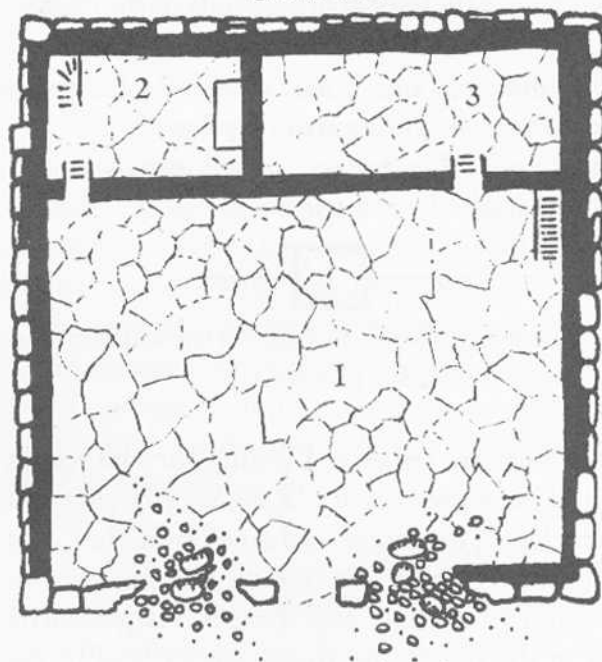
Balcony



Cellars



Ground Floor



Part of the second-story roof is missing above the entrance. The hole in the roof is twenty feet from top to bottom; and fifty feet wide. On either side of the entrance the wall has partially collapsed. There is no longer any door to the Keep; the bottom of the door frame remains, but the top has decayed.

The following description can be read to PCs who are engaged in a battle.

The old Keep's Great Hall (*Room 1*) is eighty feet wide and sixty feet long. Where the ceiling is still intact, it is sixteen feet high. The Hall now houses the bandits' horses; they are tied to pegs in the walls, under the balcony (*Room 4*). There are no windows in the Great Hall; but there are three doorways. The biggest opening is in the middle of the south wall, and leads to the Bailey. There are two other doorways in the north wall.

Stairs on the northeastern wall of the Great Hall lead up to a balcony. The stairs, like the Keep's walls and floors, are of stone. The balcony, too, is made of stone; it is seven feet above the ground floor. As wide as the Hall, the balcony is twenty feet deep. On the southwestern corner of the balcony, a flight of stairs ascends to the ceiling.

Each bandit has one horse; while all of them are adequate for riding, none are exceptionally well-bred or well-trained. The horses will whinny, stamp, or squeal if disturbed or startled.

2

The following information about the kitchen (*Room 2*) can be given to PCs in combat.

The balcony serves as a ceiling for two rooms below. The western room (*Room 2*) is twenty feet by forty feet. Three steps lead down from the Great Hall (*Room 1*) into the room; there is no door. In the middle of the east wall there is a large hearth. Stairs in the room's northeast corner lead to the basement.

When battle is over and the PCs are searching the Keep, read the following description:

The floor of the western room is two feet below the floor of the Great Hall; hence, the ceiling is nine feet tall. Small, regular holes in the door frame indicate that the room once had a door. Similar holes to the left of the stairwell were probably left by the hinges of a trapdoor.

The hearth, ten feet wide and five feet deep, still boasts several ovens and some old chains, the remains of great, turning spits. Obviously, the room was once a kitchen. The ovens are coated with soot and the dust of years, but the fireplace has been used recently. There are several iron cauldrons and one small pot on the hearth; one old andiron lies beside the fireplace.

3

The following description of the storage room (*Room 3*) can be read to PCs who are engaged in combat.

To the east of the kitchen (*Room 2*) is a 20 by 50 foot room (*Room 3*). Its only entrance is in the Great Hall (*Room 1*). Like the kitchen, this chamber is two feet below that of the Hall; again, there are three steps down from the Great Hall to the room. There is no door in the entrance. The ceiling is nine feet high.

The bandits store their horses' fodder here. No sign of the room's original purpose remains.

The western room was once an office; only one of its original furnishings remains. In the middle of the north wall there is a 5' by 5' section of stonework that does not exactly match the original wall. However, the newer stonework matches fairly well: observing the false wall is a *Perception* Δ II maneuver. The entire facade can be pried away from the surrounding stonework, to reveal a map. One of the PCs should recognize that the map is of Mirkwood and the Misty Mountains. (See the inside front cover of this sourcebook for a copy of the map.) There are small hammers and leaves painted on the map. Although the map is ancient, the vellum is whole, and peels easily from the wall.

The bandits have not discovered the map.

The following description of the balcony (*Room 4*) can be read to PCs who are engaged in battle.

The most dominant feature of the Great Hall is the balcony (*Room 4*). The balcony is made of stone, and can be reached by a stone stairway in the northeastern corner of the Great Hall. There is no handrail or other barrier between the stairs and the drop to the floor below, but there are stone posts at the foot and the top of the staircase.

The balcony is as wide as the Great Hall (80'), and is twenty feet deep. It is seven feet above the floor below. Arrow slits pierce the walls around the balcony at five-foot intervals; the cross-shaped slits face west, north, and east. Stairs at the southwestern corner of the balcony lead up to the second floor, or roof (*Room 5*), of the hideout. Again, there are stone posts, but the handrails are missing. The stairs themselves are sturdy, but are partially blocked by rubble. Although a Hobbit can climb past the fallen stones without much trouble, bigger people will find the stairs a tight squeeze.

The following description of the roof (*Room 5*) can be read to PCs engaged in combat.

Stairs from the balcony (*Room 4*) lead to the roof. Crumbling sections of walls, exterior and interior, indicate that this was once a complete story. The walls are so ruined that it is impossible to guess the original layout of the second floor. Rocks and other debris cover the floor, which has become the roof of the Keep. A hole gapes in the southern section, above the Keep's entrance; there is a second gap in the northeast, where the stairwell breaks the floor.

The following description of the common room (*Room 6*) can be read to PCs during battle.

The kitchen stairs are stone, and in good repair; they have an intact handrail. Halfway down, the stairs turn ninety degrees, then continue.

The common room was once the Keep's main cellar and is 40' by 30', with a 10' ceiling. There are doorways in the south and east walls. In the middle of the room stands a rough-hewn, rectangular pine table. Five unmatched chairs stand around the table. There is a candelabra on its surface.

The candelabra illuminates the center of the room; a torch on each wall lights the chamber's perimeter. The walls are lined with wooden bins. Two wooden kegs lie against the eastern wall. In the north of the room there is a large wooden pole, covered with notches.

The following description can be read to PCs who are not fighting, and have time to search the room.

The candelabra holds five candles. Although it is badly tarnished, the candlestick is lovely. The design is simple, but the proportions are beautiful, and the work is excellent. Beside the candelabra lie a greasy deck of cards and several sets of dice.

The cellar walls are lined with bins for storing food. Most are empty, but several sacks of flour and one of sugar lie in one bin. Another holds a smoked ham. A large keg of beer, and a smaller keg of water, stand against the east wall.

The wooden pole near the north wall is badly cut and notched. On the western wall, there is an equally damaged painting on a square of wood. The picture is crude, and depicts a man; there are small but deep gashes in it.

The bandits use the main cellar as their common room, and as an area for practicing their fighting skills. The wooden pole is a pell, used for sword practice. The wooden picture is a target, used to practice knife-throwing.

A door in the east wall of the main cellar leads to Inledair's sleeping chamber (*Room 10*); a door in the south wall leads to a secondary cellar (*Room 7*).

Excepting Inledair, Acair and Maisi, all the bandits sleep in the secondary cellar.

The following description of the sleeping chamber (*Room 7*) can be read to PCs who are engaged in battle.

This room looks like a barracks, albeit a messy one. There are five pallets, and five chests. A torch is bolted to each wall. Beds are unmade, clothing is tossed carelessly on beds or on the floor. This room is a dark, cold, and uncomfortable place to live. There are doors in the east and north walls, and a cave-like opening in the south wall.

Two of the chests are locked. One belongs to Broc; the other to Athaulf. The owners have the keys. Picking the locks is an *Subterfuge* Δ6 maneuver. None of the chests are trapped. The locked chests contain assorted clothes and personal effects, and 6-36 copper coins (roll 6d6 for each chest), and 3-18 silver coins (roll 3d6 for each chest). The unlocked chests contain clothes and other worthless possessions, and 2-12 copper coins (roll 2d6 for each chest) and 1-6 silver coins (roll 1d6 for each chest).

One chest (choose at random) has a false bottom, undiscovered by the bandits. Finding the false bottom is an *Perception* Δ13 maneuver. Beneath the false bottom are several packages of healing herbs. Obviously, this chest was acquired by the bandits, and was not one of the Keep's original furnishings: the herbs are well-preserved and usable. They include:

- a package (3 leaves) of Ladyleaf (when chewed, each leaf heals 2-12, or 2d6, Damage points)
- two packages (or nine doses) of Sweet Mallow (the leaves can be brewed in water and drunk as a tea; each dose heals 4-24, or 4d6, damage points).
- one leaf of Golden Queensfan, which will restore life and cure all damage.

The opening in the south wall leads to an irregular, cave-like extension (*Rooms 8 and 9*). The door in the east wall leads to Acair's and Maisi's room (*Room 11*).

At first glimpse, the PCs notice in the nearer cave (*Room 8*) the following:

A ten by ten by ten foot tunnel is carved into the rock to the south of the secondary cellar which serves as the bandits' sleeping chamber (*Room 7*). The tunnel leads to an irregular cave. There is an opening in the east wall. Assorted crates, barrels and bags lie about the cave.

Orcs once occupied the Keep's cellars; they carved this extension into the stone. The Orcs moved on long before this band of ruffians moved into the Keep. The bandits now store supplies and some of the goods they've captured in this room.

Although Inledair holds most of the bandits' valuable items, a few articles of lesser value can be found among the general supplies here. The cave contains a barrel of wine and one of beer; a barrel of salted meat; several sacks of meal, potatoes, and apples; and a small barrel of Eastfarthing pipeweed.

There is a pile of woolen blankets, two boxes of yarn (taken from a travelling merchant), a bolt of finely-woven white linen; and a large pile of used shoes and clothing, taken from the bandits' victims.

Mixed among the clothing are a small silver bracelet (worth 15 silver coins), a gold ring (worth 3 gold coins), a piece of tatted lace and a beautifully embroidered handkerchief.

A Man-sized leather breastplate, a Dwarf-sized chain shirt, a round shield, 2 swords, 5 daggers, and a warhammer are piled together against one wall. The weapons are all non-magical, but in fair condition.

Beside the armaments lie a small saddle, three pairs of riding boots, a pair of gaiters, a silver-inlaid whip, four riding crops, a pair of spurs, and a horse blanket.

When the PCs survey the far cave (*Room 9*), read the following description:

A passage from the west wall of the nearer cave (*Room 8*) leads to another cave-like room. The floor is covered in dust and rubble; the space is completely empty of all else.

The highlighted of Inledair's chamber (*Room 10*) description can be read during battle.

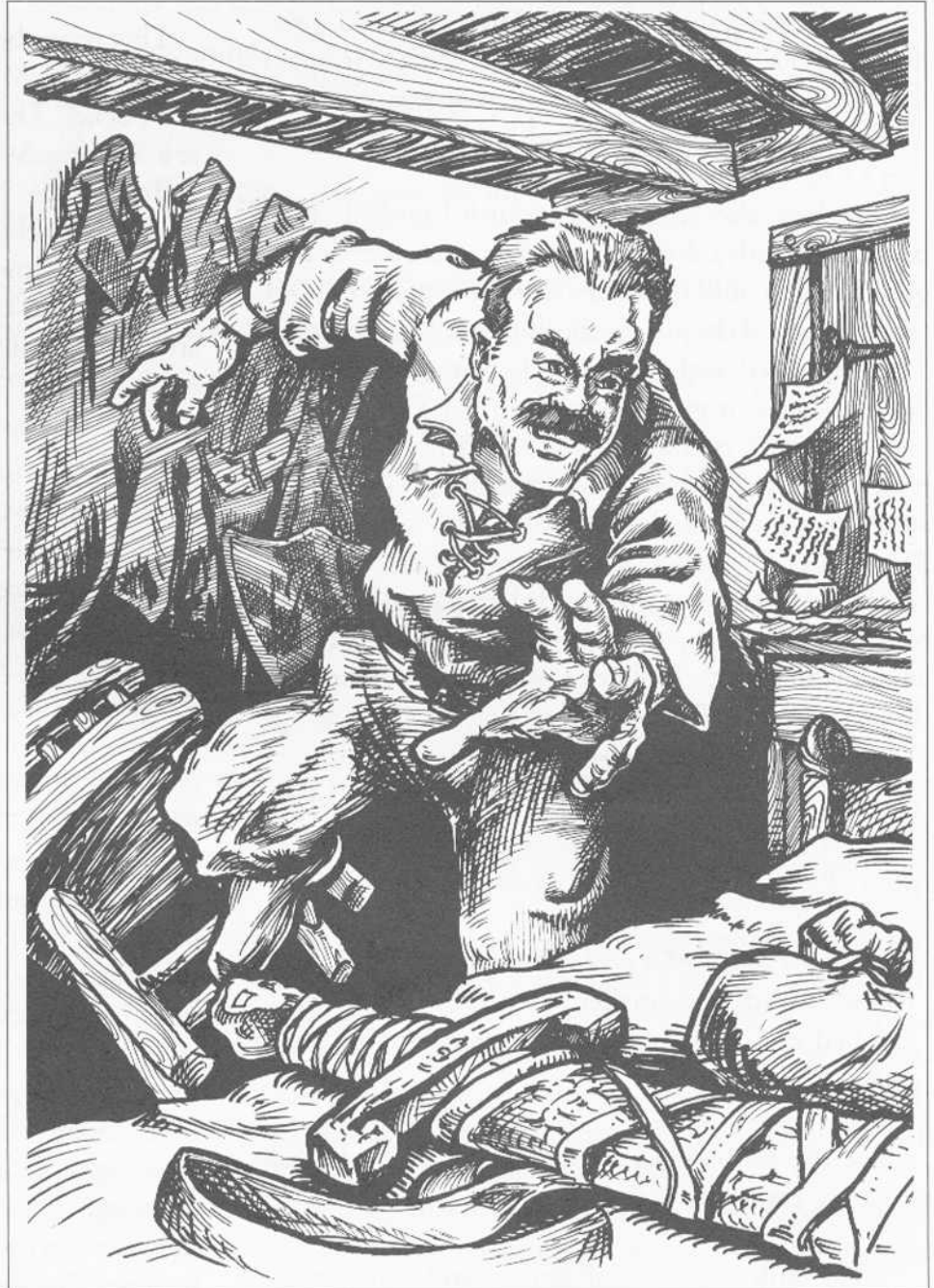
A small pine table and chair stand beside the north wall; there is a crude bed in the middle of the room. The head of the bed rests against the east wall. To the left of the bed, six pegs in the wall hold clothing. There is a large chest against the west wall.

The table is littered with papers. Some of the papers are Inledair's, but many are from his victims; they include account books, bills of sale, and letters. None of the papers are terribly interesting: Inledair keeps them because he never throws anything away. The only thing of value on the table is a candelabra, the twin of the one in the bandits' common room (*Room 6*). Intended as a wedding gift for a mastersmith's favorite niece, the candelabrum are exceptionally well-made. Separately, the candlesticks are worth 10 gold coins; together, they are worth 25 gold coins.

Although the bed is ugly, it is covered with beautiful furs, including ermine and fox. Together, the furs are worth 3 gold coins. The clothing to the left of the bed is mostly worthless, but there is one particularly well-made green cloak. The cloak is Elven, and gives its wearer at +2 bonus when hiding or stalking.

The chest to the right of the bed is of carved oak, bound in iron. It is large, heavy, and padlocked. Inledair carries the key on a chain around his neck. The chest has a poisoned-needle trap. If the PCs use the key, the trap will not go off.

Without the key, the PCs may try to pick the lock. Finding the trap is a *Perception* $\Delta 8$ maneuver; disarming the lock is an *Subterfuge* $\Delta 13$ maneuver. To pick the lock,



a PC must make a *Subterfuge* $\Delta 11$ maneuver. If a PC fails to disarm the trap, but successfully picks the lock, the trap will not be sprung. If the PC fails both to disarm the trap and to pick the lock, the poisoned needle will hit whomever is picking the lock, and will cause 10 points of Damage.

Although the chest is sturdy, it can be broken open with an axe (the chest will break after taking 45 Damage points). Using an axe to break the chest open will not spring the needle trap.

The chest will open to reveal a glittering pile of coins. There are 106 gold coins, 1190 silver coins and 8162 copper coins. They have a variety of mint marks.

Buried among the coins lies a Dwarf-made dagger. The dagger's pommel is set with emeralds; writing on the blade proclaims that the weapon was made by Torin. The blade is magic, and confers a +1 to the user's OB; it is worth 400 gold coins.

The chest also contains a beautiful mithril cloak pin, carved with a design of twisting vines, worth 275 gold coins. A gold necklace (worth 30 gold coins) is tangled around the pin. At the bottom of the chest lies a Hobbit-sized leather jerkin. The armor looks plain, but is magical: it gives its wearer a +1 *Defense bonus*.

In the south of Inledair's room, concealed in the rock wall, there is a secret door leading to a hidden store room (*Room 12*). Finding the door is an *Perception*Δ13 maneuver. If the players notice that the combined measurements of Inledair's and Acair's rooms do not add up to length of the secondary cellar, and start to actively look for a secret door, finding the door is merely a *Perception*Δ9 maneuver.

II

The following description of Acair's and Maisi's room (*Room 11*) can be read during combat.

A door in the east wall of the bandits' sleeping chamber leads to a smaller room. This room, too, is a bedroom: it contains two pallets, a table and chair, and a large chest.

Give the following information to PCs who are searching the room.

The table bears a small lantern and a throwing dagger. The blankets on the bed are serviceable; the chest is locked. A row of pegs beside the chest hold clothing. Some of the clothes are large, some small; there are several dresses. Obviously, two people, one male and one female, share the room.

This room belongs to Inledair's lieutenant, Acair, and his wife, Maisi. Maisi keeps the key to the chest in a pocket. The lock is not trapped; picking the lock is a *Subterfuge*Δ9 maneuver. The chest contains a gold and sapphire ring (too large for Maisi's fingers) worth 10 gold coins; a silver goblet carved with pictures of flowers, and set with small gems (worth 70 gold coins); and coins of different mints. There are 3 gold coins, 42 silver coins, and 157 copper coins.

12

The hidden storage room can be reached by a secret door in Inledair's chamber (*Room 10*). Originally used as a hiding place and store room for special items, the space still contains several ancient crates. The contents of the crates are so old that most will crumble to dust if handled.

One crate contains a blackened metal teapot, wrapped in a rotted cloth. The teapot is silver and, when cleaned, lovely; it is worth 3 gold coins.

Mixed up with the mouldering contents of another crate is an exquisitely carved wooden box. Inside the box, there is a book. The book is obviously very old, but is in excellent condition. Written in Westron, the book's title is *Herblore: On the Propagation and Preservation of Useful Herbs*. The book gives explicit direction for propagating, growing and preserving a variety of herbs. Some of the herbs in the book are commonly used, but the uses of others have been forgotten. Although the PCs have no way of knowing it, the directions in the book are excellent: if anyone follows its directions for growing and curing herbs, the herbs are twice as potent as they would normally be.

In the middle of the east wall there is another secret door. Finding the secret door is a *Perception*Δ11 maneuver.

13

Behind the secret door in the hidden store room (*Room 12*), there is an escape tunnel (*Room 13*). Stairs lead sharply down beyond the door. The tunnel is completely blocked by collapsed walls 35' past the door.



he summer sun was only a glow in the west, and the first stars were shining in the twilight. Camp was set up, and a ham sizzled gently on the campfire.

"So we did it," Tom said. "We took on the scourge of the Great East Road. And now we are going to the Last Homely House."

"I've heard of the Last Homely House," Lily said, "but I never thought I would go there. Bilbo Baggins — they call him 'Mad Baggins' over in the Shire — told me a little about it. He said it was a perfect house, and he talked a lot about the gardens. He didn't mention herbs, but there must be acres of flowers."

Gallind smiled. "Not quite acres, but yes, the gardens are beautiful. The entire valley is lovely. And Elrond rules over it all."

"What's he like?"

"Very wise," Rilwen replied. "But tomorrow you shall judge for yourselves!"

• SIX •

SCENE 5: "ALL OVER, AND WELL OVER"

This Scene consists of two *sequences*.

In the first, "THE LAST HOMELY HOUSE," the party travels to Rivendell.

The PCs talk to Elrond, identify their magic items, and celebrate in the second *sequence*, "IN THE HOUSE OF ELROND."

"THE LAST HOMELY HOUSE"



Once the party has searched the hideout, they will need to decide which items to take with them. Unless they brought a wagon along, they won't be able to take everything. Transporting chests and furniture would be difficult in any case; but there should be at least one bandit horse that can carry treasure. After the horse (or horses) is laden, the PCs can divide weapons and other smaller things among themselves, at least temporarily.

If the party has prisoners, they will also need to consider what to do with the bandits. The best plan might be to take them to Rivendell. Elrond would be kind to the prisoners, but would not release them unless they were truly reformed.

Both for the sake of prisoners, and for their own sakes, the party should leave for Rivendell after they have finished with the Keep. Although they have fresh provisions, the PCs may need a chance to rest, or be healed. They may be carrying Gandalf's scroll. Even if they aren't, Aragorn is waiting for them at the Last Homely House; and Elrond can help them identify their magic items. In any case, the chance to visit Rivendell should never be wasted.

• *When the party is ready to travel to Rivendell, go to stage 2.*

GM NOTE

When the players are deciding what to take and how to carry it, you can interfere as much or as little as you wish. If the PCs want to keep the petty cash, and abandon the herb book and magic sword, you might want to advise them to reconsider. Of course, you may prefer to let them make their own mistakes. You'll probably want to be more helpful if the players are new to gaming, or young; or if they saved the last piece of pizza for their beloved GM.

If it's much after noon, the party should wait until morning to leave for Elrond's house. Even if the bandits are still alive, the PCs are safer barricaded in a room in the Keep, with someone on watch, than they are wandering through Troll country after dark. And if the accommodations are less than ideal, there are beds, food, drink, and even entertainment (cards, dice, papers to read...).

In the morning, the PCs should make their way back to the Great East Road. Read the following description:

The meadow is quiet; the bandits' old watchpost deserted. You reach the Great East Road unchallenged, and comfortable with the knowledge that you have made the Road a little safer, at least for now.

Elrond's home lies to the east, beyond the River Bruinen. You can see the river, flowing between its stony banks; but it is still far away. The Road leaves the open fields and cuts through a dark grove of pines. Beyond the pines, there are stony hills. Heather grows thick along the roadside.

Morning stretches to afternoon, and then to evening, and still you travel between the sullen hills. Before the sun disappears, you find a small cliff near the Road to camp beside. The cliff protects your campsite from the north wind, and a copse shelters it from the westerly breeze; you are well provisioned and spend a peaceful night.

The sunrise is hidden by clouds. The hills are even more dreary in the grey light. Shortly after noon, a fine rain begins to fall; a forlorn raven caws from a hazel. By late afternoon, the sun returns, but everyone is damp and miserable. The best campground you can find is a small clearing off the Road, at the foot of a hill. The ground is rocky, and wolves howl for most of the night.

The new day is fine. Although the sun cannot bring cheer to the countryside, it does its best. The heather is blooming with all its might, the bees are working frantically, and a thrush works up the courage to sing. The Road enters a dark grove of pine trees; then cuts between walls of red rock. When you leave the trees, the sun dazzles your eyes. White and grey mountains loom before you; at the bottom of a steep hill lies the Bruinen.

The Bruinen, or Loudwater, is a fast-flowing, noisy river. The East Road goes down its steep bank, then across the river at the Ford of Bruinen. Although the current at the Ford is swift, the water is shallow. On the far side of the river, a path curves up the steep bank.

Beyond the river, the land slopes steadily up to meet the mountains. White rocks are set at intervals to mark the road to Rivendell; but some are overgrown with moss, or missing entirely. Not far from the river, you lose the trail. You don't have to search long, however, before an Elf appears.

"Welcome!" she says, "I am Galoranna, and was sent by Elrond to help you find your way. The Dúnadan says that you have bested some evil bandits! But hurry now — you are expected."

Galoranna turns, and walks uphill. It seems like the ground slopes continually, all the way to the mountains ahead; but you suddenly come upon a valley, unseen and unexpected.

The descent is steep. As you make your way down, the air grows warmer; it is fragrant with the blossoms of many flowers. You leave conifers behind, and enter stands of beech and oak. At the bottom of the hill, Galoranna leads you to the east; before long, you encounter a path.

"Nearly home now," Galoranna announces, as you follow her down the path. A swift river crosses the path; you walk over it on a narrow bridge, into the gardens of Elrond's house.

• *Go to the next sequence, "IN THE HOUSE OF ELROND."*

"IN THE HOUSE OF ELROND"

I

The party has arrived at the Last Homely House. They have been shown to their rooms and given a chance to freshen up before being summoned to meet Elrond.

After you have had a chance to wash, and are all together again, Galoranna arrives to take you to a meeting with Elrond. She leads you down the hall, up a short set of stairs, down a corridor, around a corner, and into a room.

Elrond is sitting in a carved chair, before an open window. He wears a circlet of silver on his dark hair; his eyes are grey, and shine with a light like the stars. Although his face is unlined, it is full of wisdom, and the memory of many years.

"Welcome, my friends," Elrond says, smiling. "So you have returned from errantry. Were your efforts successful?"

If the PCs have vanquished the bandits, Elrond will praise them for their skill, and for performing so noble a deed. Even if they failed, Elrond will praise their valor.

- If the party has brought Gandalf's scroll for Elrond, go to stage 2.
- If not, go to stage 3.

2

After the PCs have presented the scroll, read the following:

Elrond unrolls the parchment and glances through it.

"Here is a scroll that has long been missing. I have never seen it, but I have heard of this spell. Once it was in the library at Annúminas.

And now Círdan has found it again. And you, my friends, have brought it to me. I thank you. Did you learn the spell? And was it a help in your need?"

If the PCs tell Elrond that they could only learn part of the spell, he will offer to make a copy of the scroll for them. He will advise them to study the spell in their spare time, since they may in time be able to learn the entire spell.

- Go to stage 3.

GM NOTE

If any PC studies the scroll, he or she will gain a deeper understanding of the spell. Whenever a PC can learn a new spell, he or she may choose to learn more about this spell. Each time the PC learns more about the spell, the duration of the sleep will be doubled for each point of *Damage Taken* when he or she casts the spell.

Thus, if Gallind has learned the spell once, and studies this spell two more times (instead of learning two new spells), he will be able to cause one target to sleep for four rounds every time he takes one point of *Damage* casting the spell. If Tatharína hasn't learned the spell, but studies the spell two times, she will be able to cause one target to sleep for two rounds per point of *Damage Taken*. If she later learns the spell two more times, she will be able to cause an opponent to sleep 8 rounds per point.

3

If the party wants Elrond's help in identifying their treasure, he will help them. He knows the properties of the herbs. He also recognizes all the magic items, knew of Torin, recognizes that the book is magically preserved, and knows that the directions are good. He is delighted with the map, which he says shows old refuges. Those marked with leaves are hidden Elven refuges; the hammers show Dwarvish refuges. The map will be useful to those of Elrond's household when they go out on errantry; and may help in the fight against the Necromancer. The party may want to give the map to Elrond, or at least let him copy it.

- Go to stage 4.

GM NOTE

If you didn't list the magic items as the party found them, you may need to flip back and look them up. Magic items can be found in *stage 12* of "TO LOOK AHEAD," and in *stages 10 and 12* of "THERE IS NOTHING LIKE LOOKING."

4

After the party has discussed the treasure with Elrond, he will lead them to a feast. Read the following description.

The hall is bright with candles. You are seated at the high table with Elrond, Aragorn, Arwen, and other fair folk. The table is laden with breads, honey, cheeses, fruits, and roasted meats. There is a drink, cool and refreshing, like the taste of honeysuckle on a summer night.

Elrond lifts his goblet to toast you.

"To our brave adventurers," he says, "may the stars shine on your future travels. I name you Elf-friends; and welcome you to Rivendell."

The feast progresses in laughter and merriment. Later there may be songs and dancing under the stars; for now, you eat and drink, laugh and talk, in the Last Homely House. It is a perfect place to rest from your adventures. Soon enough, the Road will beckon again, and you may ride forth to battle Giants. But for now, it is enough to rest in Elrond's home.

Now is the time for you to hand out *experience points* to your doughty crew. For each PC, note down 20 *EPs* for completing Scene 5. Then add all the numbers you recorded on your chart, and give the totals to each of the players.

Good work! When you're rested and ready for more, you can gather your players together again and test their skills in the next adventure, "OVER THE MISTY MOUNTAINS COLD."

... In those days of our tale there were still some people who had both Elves and heroes of the North for ancestors, and Elrond the master of the house was their chief.

He was as noble and as fair in face as an Elf-lord, as strong as a warrior, as wise as a wizard, as venerable as a king of Dwarves, and as kind as summer. He comes into many tales, but his part in the story of Bilbo's great adventures is only a small one, though important, as you will see, if we ever get to the end of it. His house was perfect, whether you liked food, or sleep, or work, or story-telling, or singing, or just sitting and thinking best, or a pleasant mixture of them all. Evil things did not come into that valley.

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, page 51*

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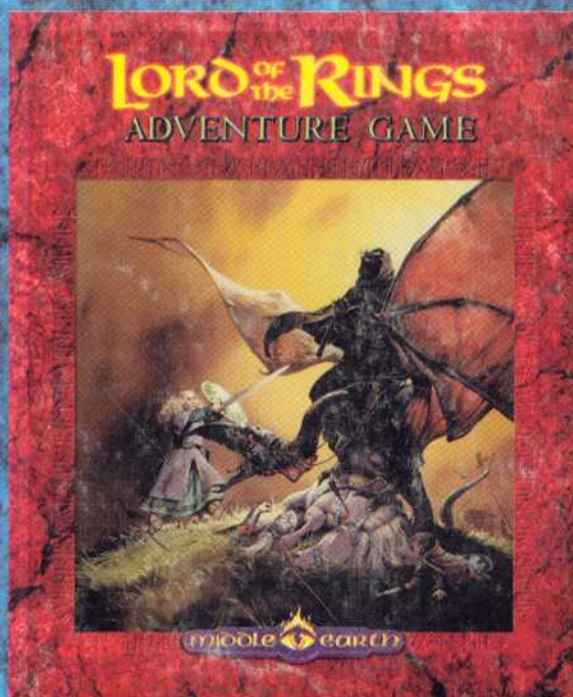
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